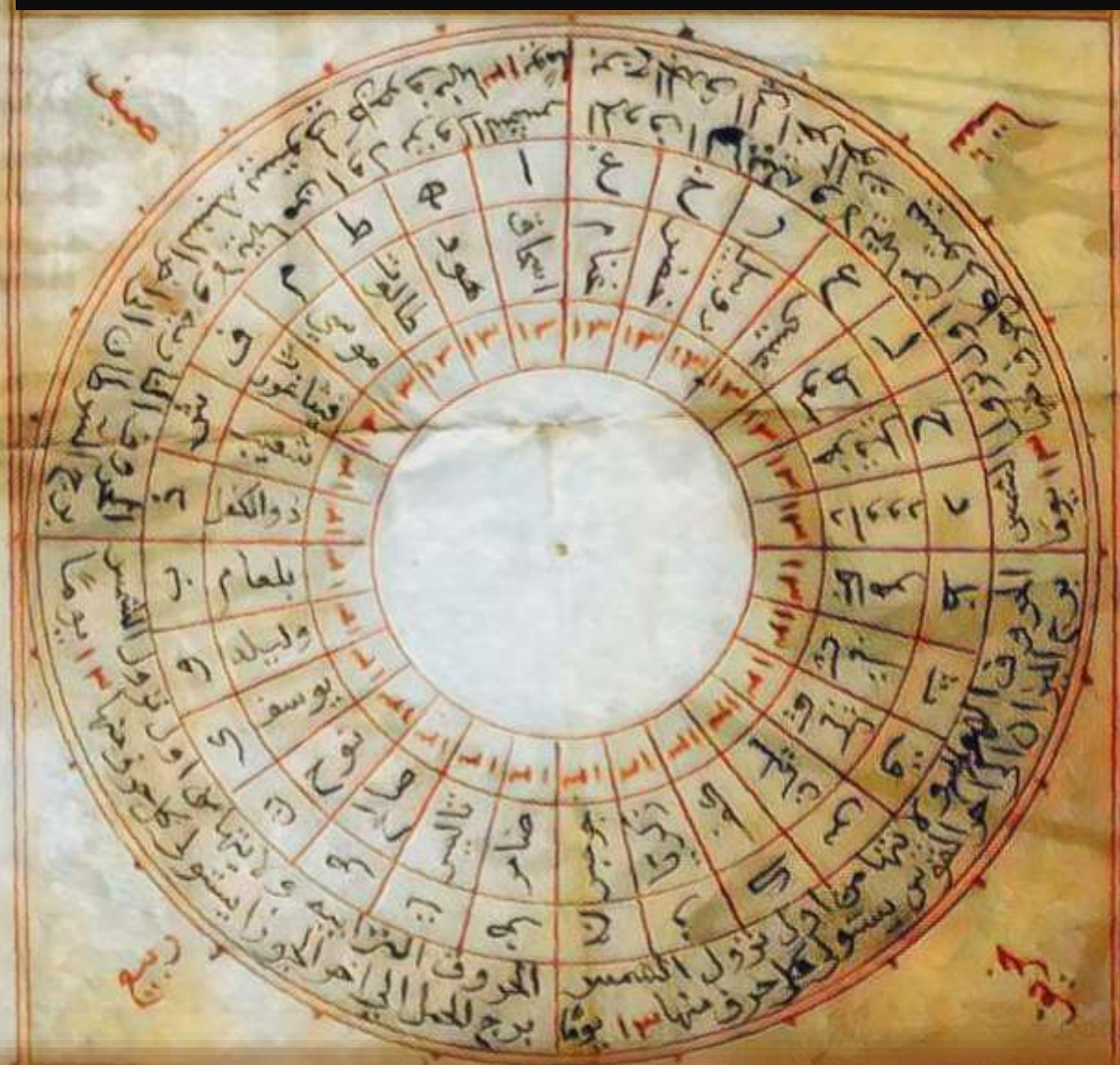


Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi's

Commentary on Ibn Arabi's Fusus al Hikam



An Analysis and Interpretation

Andrew Lane

Abstract

‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī’s (1641-1731) Commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*: an Analysis and Interpretation

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This thesis is an analysis and interpretation of six chapters from al-Nābulusī’s commentary. One of these is an account of his intentions for writing the commentary and the other five are commentaries on parts of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. These chapters chosen from al-Nābulusī’s commentary treat important subjects in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* which exemplify Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought particularly well. They are concerned with certain issues which were perceived to have a special importance in the Islamic religious tradition. One issue, for example, is that of Pharaoh’s profession of faith which was a prominent subject of debate and discussion in Islamic literature. Ibn ‘Arabī’s position on this was severely criticised by many.

The thesis argues that there are four ways in which to appreciate the commentary’s intellectual and religious outlook: first, with respect to its approach to Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas; second, with respect to its use of Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* in the specific context of developing an independence from Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought and in the general context of Qur’ānic exegesis; third, in its use of language, narrative and metaphor; finally, in its legal approach towards the issue of Pharaoh’s faith evincing arguments similar to those of Ibn ‘Arabī, but not identical, and, like Ibn ‘Arabī, adopting positions different from those of the wider Islamic religious tradition.

The thesis demonstrates that the commentary’s significance can be appreciated in two historical contexts: the anti-Ibn ‘Arabī tendency manifest in late 17th century Damascus; and the enduring tradition of polemics surrounding Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought.



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The intellectual history of the Middle East has been a neglected field, especially in the early modern period, *ca.* 1600-1800. This period was dismissed by an earlier generation of scholars as one of general and uniform decline in which there was no significant intellectual activity. Gibb and Bowen described the Islamic intellectual culture in the 18th century as having fallen below its own medieval standards and that its literary production degenerated resulting in copious amounts of unoriginal scholastic works.¹ Concerning the period from 1517 to 1800, Gibb states that:

After the Ottoman conquests a profound intellectual lethargy seems to settle on the Arab lands ... Literary composition seems to have continued almost as actively as before, but only a pitifully small handful of works stands out from the monotonous mass of mediocrity.²

These assumptions have remained unchallenged until comparatively recently. Marshall Hodgson argues that 'in the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth, the Muslims found themselves at a peak point not only of political power but also of cultural activity ... the two centuries from 1500 to 1700 were by and large a time of relatively strong institutions, of a confident intellectual life, and above all of imposing

¹ Gibb & Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (London: OUP, 1957), I, 161-3.

² Gibb, HAR, *Arabic Literature - An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp.155-6. This paradigm of intellectual decline can be found in later works too, for example: Dodge, B, *Muslim Education in Medieval Times* (Washington DC: The Middle East Institute, 1962), p.86; Nashabi, H, 'Educational Institutions', in *The Islamic City*, ed. by RB Serjeant (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), pp.66-89 (p.82); and Sibai, MM, *Mosque Libraries - An Historical Study* (London & New York: Mansell Publishing, 1987), p.34.

esthetic [sic] creation.³ In reality this period was not devoid of intellectual vigour and significance.⁴

In attempts to show this intellectual and cultural creativity, some modern scholars have undertaken research into some of the material from this period and the figures associated with it. A study has been written on al-Shaʿrānī, an Egyptian Sufi and scholar of the 16th century, whose ideas and influence were of great importance in his time and after.⁵ A number of comparative studies of the famous Sufi and mufti of 17th century Jerusalem, Khair al-Dīn al-Ramlī, dismiss the paradigm of intellectual decline in this period.⁶ Similarly, work has been conducted upon the writings of Egyptian Sufis of the 18th century and the importance of their ideas for cushioning the indigenous development of capitalism in pre-modern Egypt.⁷ There has been much work on the Sufi 'reformist movements' of the 18th century. Both Rahman and Trimingham have examined 18th and 19th century revival movements.⁸ John Voll examined various biographical sources and *ḥadīth* works to discuss the informal networks of 18th century revivalist scholars and their activities.⁹ Elizabeth Sirriyeh has written about the struggle for religious renewal in the 18th century and its Sufi origins:

³ Hodgson, MGS, *Rethinking World History - Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, ed. by E Burke III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.100 & 204.

⁴ Gerber, H, *Islamic Law and Culture 1600-1840* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp.23, 28 & 135.

⁵ Winter, M, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of ʿAbd al-Wahhab al-Shaʿrānī*: Studies in Islamic Culture and History, 4, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1982).

⁶ ʿAbbās, I, 'Khair ad-Dīn ar-Ramlī's Fatawā: A New Light on Life in Palestine in the Eleventh/Seventeenth Century', in *Die Islamische Welt Zwischen Mittelaltes und Neuzeit, Festschrift für Hans Robert Roemer*, ed. by Ulrich Haarmann & Peter Bachman (Beirut: for Steiner (Wiesbaden), 1979), pp.1-19; Ze'evi, D, *An Ottoman Century - The District of Jerusalem in the 1600s* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996); Gerber, H, *Islamic Law*; and Gerber, H, *State, Society, and Law in Islam - Ottoman Law in Comparative Perspective* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

⁷ Gran, P, *The Islamic Roots of Capitalism* (Austin, Texas, 1979).

⁸ Rahman, F, *Islam*, 2nd edn (London: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Trimingham, JS, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York & Oxford: OUP, 1998).

⁹ Voll, J, 'Linking Groups in the Networks of Eighteenth Century Revivalist Scholars', in *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, ed. by Levtzion and Voll (Syracuse, 1987).

whether scholarly sheikhs noted for their intellectual achievements in other branches of Islamic learning or those noted solely for their devotion to the spiritual life, or indeed the many ordinary members of Sufi *ṭarīqas* that espoused the reforming cause.¹⁰ Such works support Marshall Hodgson's insights into the cultural and intellectual creativity of this period.

The life and works of ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, 1641-1731, open a window onto the cultural, religious and intellectual activity of this period. Al-Nābulusī was a scholar and Sufi who lived in Damascus within the realm of the Ottoman empire. He is renowned for his writings, travels and teaching.

There are significant lacunae in the scholarship on al-Nābulusī. Barbara Von Schlegell's thesis is the only major English language study of al-Nābulusī.¹¹ Her focus is on the stability of the institutions of Sufi orders through the example of al-Nābulusī's life. She also examines al-Nābulusī as a defender of Sufism as part of mainstream Islam and as a promoter of the ideas of Ibn ʿArabī. One major flaw in her work is that she assumes that al-Nābulusī's beliefs are the same as Ibn ʿArabī's beliefs as found in the latter's writings and as described by various modern scholars.¹²

¹⁰ Sirriyeh, E, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis - The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999).

¹¹ Von Schlegell, BR, 'Sufism in the Ottoman Arab World: Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d.1143/1731)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1997). In French there is: ʿAlā' al-Dīn, B, 'ʿAbdalḡanī an-Nābulusī (1143/1731) - Oeuvre, Vie et Doctrine', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Paris I, 1985). In Arabic there are: Basil, VS, 'Waḥdat al-Wujūd ʿinda Ibn ʿArabī wa-ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Saint Joseph, Beirut, 1986); Qalaygyan, S, 'ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī - Ḥayātuh wa-shiʿruh' (unpublished doctoral thesis, no further details).

¹² Von Schlegell, 'Sufism', p.170.

Bakri ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s thesis is a biographical bibliographical study which describes the major contours of his life. This work is in two parts. The first part is a biography which describes the political and social environment in which al-Nābulusī grew up and lived. He discusses the *faqīh-sufī* conflict of al-Nābulusī’s Damascus. It also includes an analysis of some of his mystical ideas as found in various works. The second part is a bibliographical study of the manuscripts and printed editions of al-Nābulusī’s works.

Victor Said Basil’s work compares statements from various works of al-Nābulusī with those from Ibn ‘Arabī. He focuses on a number of themes including the oneness of existence, deeds, good and evil, free-will and predetermination, and reward and punishment. He suggests that al-Nābulusī displays in his works an excess of comment and clarification whereas Ibn ‘Arabī’s style is more obscure, more learned, and broader and richer in knowledge and ideas.

Shughik Qalaygyan describes the intellectual, social, economic and political aspects of al-Nābulusī’s period. He examines al-Nābulusī’s family background, life, education and writings. He provides a study of al-Nābulusī’s poetry and some of the mystical themes found therein, such as the concept of existence. He also looks at the reasons for al-Nābulusī’s devotion to Sufism.

Besides these theses, there have been a number of articles published on al-Nābulusī. Their focus is principally on his travel writings and poetic works.¹³ There

¹³ See Khālidī, WAS, ‘‘Abd al-Ghanī b. Ismā‘īl al-Nābulusī’’, in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 1, 60; Kelner-H, B, ‘‘Abd al-Ganī an-Nābulusī and His Turkish Disciples’’, *Revue d’Histoire*

are occasional references to al-Nābulusī in the secondary literature on the 17th and 18th centuries or in thematic studies of Middle Eastern history, literature, philosophy and Sufism.¹⁴ On the whole these are positive, but are not supported with references, for example:

Sūfism was the most significant cultural feature of the age and provided its most noteworthy writers: ... and the Syrian ‘Abd al-Ghanī of Nāblus (d.1731), a prolific author who originated a new kind of mystical travel-literature in rhymed prose, and a gifted poet as well.¹⁵

And,

Of writers who were touched by this new Naqshbandi teaching, the most famous was ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi (1641-1731), a Damascene whose voluminous works included commentaries on the teaching of Ibn ‘Arabi and a number of descriptions of journeys to shrines, which are also records of spiritual progress.¹⁶

There is one exception to the general praising of al-Nābulusī. William C

Chittick, a prolific author on Sufism, especially on Ibn ‘Arabī, discusses al-Nābulusī in

Maghrebine/al-Majalla al-Ta’rīkhiyya al-Maghribiyya, 59-60 (1990), 107-112; Amoretti, BS, ‘A ‘modern’ example of religious feeling: marginal notes on the writings of the mystic Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi (1641-1731)’, in *For a Palestinian: a Memorial to Wael Zuaiter*, ed. by J Venn-Brown (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), pp.188-199; Kamada, S, ‘Nābulusī’s Commentary on Ibn al-Fārid’s Khamrīyah’, *Orient (Tokyo)*, 18 (1992), 19-40; Winter, M, ‘A Polemical Treatise by ‘Abd al-Ganī al-Nābulusī against a Turkish Scholar on the Religious Status of the Dimmīs’, *ARABICA*, 35 (1988), 92-103; Sirriyeh, E, ‘The Mystical Journeys of ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī’, *Die Welt des Islams*, 25 (1985), 84-96; Sirriyyah, E, ‘The Journeys of ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī in Palestine (1101/1690 & 1105/1693)’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 24 (1979), 55-69; Sirriyyah, E, ‘Ziyārāt of Syria in a Rihla of ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1050/1641-1143/1731)’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (1979), 109-122; Abahsain, MM, ‘The Supra-Symbolic Moth in Arabic Religious Poetry from the Late Ottoman Period’, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 24i (1993), 21-27; Al-Munajjid, S, & Wild, S, (editors), *Zwei Beschreibungen des Libanon: ‘Abdalganī al-Nābulusīs Reise durch die Biqā’ und al-‘Utaifīs Reise nach Tripolis* (Wiesbaden, 1979); Busse, H, (editor), *Die Reise des ‘Abd al-Ganī an-Nābulusī durch den Libanon* (Beirut, 1971); Busse, H, ‘‘Abd al-Ganī an-Nābulusīs Reisen im Libanon (1100/1689-1112/1700)’, *Der Islam* 44 (1968), 71-114; Al-Nābulusī, *Al-Ḥaqīqa wa’l-Majāz fī Riḥlat Bilād al-Shām wa-Miṣr wa’l-Ḥijāz*, edited by RAH Murād (Damascus, 1989).

¹⁴ For example: Gibb, *Arabic Literature*, p.156; Hourani, A. *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p.240; Trimingham, JS, *The Sufi Orders*, pp.70 & 95; Hodgson, MGS, *The Venture of Islam - Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*, 3 vols (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), iii, 123; Lings, M, *What is Sufism?* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p.121.

¹⁵ Gibb, *Arabic Literature*, p.156.

¹⁶ Hourani, *A History*, p.240.

a more negative but focused way. He says of al-Nābulusī's commentary on Ibn

ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*:

Perhaps the most widely read commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* in the Arab world was written by the prolific Sufi author ʿAbd al-Ghānī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1730); his care to define and explain every single word and his often questionable interpretations suggest that already by his time the general ability to read and understand the *Fuṣūṣ* in the Arab world had severely declined.¹⁷

However, in a work published two years later, Henri Corbin, a renowned scholar of Ibn ʿArabī, argues that:

The Syrian theosopher and mystic ʿAbd al-Ghānī al-Nāblūsī [sic] ... was a prolific writer in the tradition of Ibn al-ʿArabī (he left an excellent commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* in two great quarto volumes) ... It is to be hoped that a complete edition of the works of al-Nāblūsī, and a general study of them, will shortly appear.¹⁸

Al-Nābulusī's intellectual outlook reflects and engages with certain earlier intellectual traditions, especially that of Ibn ʿArabī. Throughout the majority of his works, al-Nābulusī discusses Sufi ideas. This is even the case in his legalistic work on the licitness of listening to musical instruments.¹⁹ Most central to al-Nābulusī's *oeuvre* is his intralinear commentary upon Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.²⁰ No western scholarly analysis of this commentary exists.

¹⁷ Chittick, WC, 'Ibn ʿArabī and His School' in *Islamic Spirituality - Manifestations*, ed. by SH Nasr (New York, 1991), pp.49-79 (pp.53-4). Von Schlegell, 'Sufism', p.77n.209, echoes Chittick when she suggests that al-Nābulusī composed his commentary 'as a straightforward line-by-line explanation'.

¹⁸ Corbin, H, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London & New York: Kegan Paul International, 1993), pp.312-3.

¹⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḥ al-Dalālāt fī Samāʿ al-Ālāt*, ed. by AR Hammūsh (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1981).

²⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. by AA ʿAfīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1980). Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, 2 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1304-1323); and al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, British Library, MS No. Or11877, 156 fols. I call al-Nābulusī's commentary intralinear, because his comments are situated within rather than between the lines of Ibn ʿArabī's original.

Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is divided into twenty-seven chapters, each of which is in the framework of Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* which Ibn ʿArabī considers relevant to a particular Qur'ānic prophet in the exposition of his own ideas.²¹ For Ibn ʿArabī, these prophets exemplified the basic 'truths' of his Sufi world-view. Each 'truth' is called wisdom (*ḥikma*) and is in the form of a 'word' (*kalima*). Ibn ʿArabī explains this in a general way in his opening words of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*:

Praise be to God who brings down wisdom upon the hearts of words.²²

Al-Nābulusī explains with references to Qur'ān 4:171, Qur'ān 66:12, and Qur'ān 7:158 that the term 'words' (*kalimāt*) can be applied to perfect souls which are God's prophets:

(Upon the hearts of words (*al-kalim*))²³ [this is] the plural of word (*kalima*), by which is meant the perfect human essence. It is called 'word' in the Qur'ān. God said concerning ʿĪsā, 'and His word which He bestowed upon Maryam.'²⁴ God said concerning the faith of Maryam in the rest of the prophets, 'and she believed in the words of her Lord and in His books.'²⁵ God said, 'The unlettered Prophet who believes in God and His words.'²⁶ Thus one can apply 'words' to perfect souls in the virtues of knowledge and acts.²⁷

Each chapter in Ibn ʿArabī's original relates a particular 'wisdom' (*ḥikma*) to a specific prophet in its title. For example, the chapter on Ibrāhīm discusses the relationship between God and man in terms of delirious love and mutual pervasion.

²¹ The one exception to this general rule is the prophet Khālīd b. Sinān who does not appear in the Qur'ān.

²² Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 47.

²³ This is Ibn ʿArabī's original which is followed by al-Nābulusī's comment.

²⁴ Qur'ān 4:171.

²⁵ Qur'ān 66:12.

²⁶ Qur'ān 7:158.

²⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 7.

Ibrāhīm pervades God's attributes and vice versa. The chapter on Hārūn discusses the issue of leadership and the worship of the golden calf. Hārūn's leadership was unable to prevent the worship of the calf, but Mūsā stopped it upon his return. Ibn ʿArabī suggests that God was actually worshipped in the calf. The chapter on Zakariyyā discusses the role of mercy in the creation of the world. Mercy becomes less of an ethical and more of an ontological attribute. It should be noted that there is an ambiguity in Ibn ʿArabī's writings: although he may appear to say one thing - the main thrust of his writing - he does not disavow its negation at the same time. This is an important feature of his style of writing.²⁸

The appreciation of Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* has never been an easy task. From the days of his first followers to the present century there has been a tradition of commentaries upon this abstruse work.²⁹ Al-Nābulusī is a link in the chain of the interpreters of Ibn ʿArabī. Most scholarship has focused upon the earliest commentaries as an aid to the appreciation of Ibn ʿArabī's original. A noteworthy example of this is Toshihiko Izutsu's use of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī's (d.1330) commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* in his outstanding analysis of Ibn ʿArabī's 'philosophy'.³⁰ Al-Nābulusī, however, felt that the previous commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* were difficult to understand and thus there was a need for a more

²⁸ The various chapters of this thesis will provide detailed treatment of these themes and their interpretation by al-Nābulusī.

²⁹ See Morris, JW, 'Ibn ʿArabī and His Interpreters', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 106iii (1986), 539-551, 106iv (1986), 733-756, 107i (1987), 101-119.

³⁰ Izutsu, T, *Sufism and Taoism - A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (London: University of California Press, 1984).

accessible and clear commentary.³¹ He completed this during a spiritual retreat on the 29th May 1685.

Although their formats mirror each other and al-Nābulusī viewed his understanding of Ibn ʿArabī’s ideas to be the same as Ibn ʿArabī’s own understanding, the texts indicate that they diverge significantly at different points. Al-Nābulusī’s commentary is no mere paraphrase. Like all commentaries that are reflecting and attempting to be true to the original, it does also express an originality of thought for explicating the original in its own time and place. It naturally places novel limits on the original text in a manner to produce a subtly new and original interpretation.³²

This thesis will examine six chapters from al-Nābulusī’s commentary. These are his introduction to the commentary and the chapters on Ibrāhīm, Zakariyyā, Hārūn, Mūsā and Muḥammad. In Ibn ʿArabī’s original work these chapters are of particular interest to any enquiry into his thought and ideas.³³ Although each one represents the world-view of the whole work, they exemplify particular themes too. Al-Nābulusī’s commentary upon them will delineate and represent the contours of his own thought

³¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 2.

³² Rahbar, D, ‘Reflections on the Tradition of Qur’anic Exegesis’, *The Muslim World*, 52 (1962), 296-307 (p.304) states that ‘in interlinear commentaries the authors are subject to contextual control, and in fact in their pious effort to assure semantic continuity often transfer meanings of phrases to contiguous verses. Thus commentaries by their influence transform the lexical history of a language’. Such transformation introduces perforce originality.

³³ Al-Shaʿrānī, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb al-Yawāqīt wa’l-Jawāhir fī Bayān ʿAqāʾid al-Akābir* (Cairo: Būlāq, 1890), pp.13-4, lists some of the key accusations levelled against Ibn ʿArabī by the 16th century. These include themes found in the chapters on Ibrāhīm, Zakariyyā, Hārūn, and Mūsā. This is corroborated by Knysh, AD, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition - the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999). The chapter on Muḥammad is of interest because of the importance of ideas concerning Muḥammad in Sufi works. Al-Nābulusī’s introduction reveals his intentions in writing his commentary and his views about mankind.

and ideas as well as his reception and understanding of one of Ibn ʿArabī's most significant works.

There are four ways in which the outlook of al-Nābulusī's commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* may be appreciated: first, with respect to Ibn ʿArabī's ideas and themes; second, with respect to the use of Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* in explicating Ibn ʿArabī's ideas; third, in al-Nābulusī's use of language, narrative and metaphor in the composition of his commentary, which use both reflects and moves beyond Ibn ʿArabī; and finally, in his legal approach to arguing the case for the soundness of Pharaoh's profession of faith. These four fields of creativity constitute the uniqueness of al-Nābulusī in the commentary.

The principal themes of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* are based upon the fundamental relationship between God and man. This is the foundation upon which the structure of ideas is constructed. Both Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī concentrate on the metaphysical and abstract in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, as well as upon the method of understanding this relationship. What is clear from the texts is that al-Nābulusī reveals different concerns to those of Ibn ʿArabī.

For example, in the chapter on Ibrāhīm, both Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī focus on the ontological and epistemological relationship between God and man. However, al-Nābulusī reveals a tendency to stress the difference between God and man in existential terms, whereas Ibn ʿArabī stresses the ontological 'sameness', if not

‘identity’ between them. Al-Nābulusī explains in almost syllogistic terms that God has the ‘true existence,’ whereas all created things other than Him have no existence at all. Existentially they are utterly different. Thus, all created things exist only through God. In one respect, they are utterly different from God, but in another respect they are similar to Him in existing through Him. Ibn ‘Arabī, on the other hand, presents a ‘full reciprocity and (ontological) intertwining between God and man.’³⁴ Although Ibn ‘Arabī does and must leave some ambiguity, this ambiguity pales in comparison to al-Nābulusī’s unequivocal position that God and man are existentially different.

Another example is in the chapter on Hārūn where Ibn ‘Arabī stresses that God appears in everything and that every object of worship is God, or rather an appearance of God. He is therefore intimating that, *on one level*, all forms of worship may be understood as legitimate. Al-Nābulusī qualifies this argument by suggesting that the worshippers’ knowledge of the object of their devotion determines the status of their worship. If they know that they are worshipping God as a manifestation in an idol, then their worship is licit because they know that God is not the same as the idol. On the other hand, if they are ignorant of this distinction and maintain their worship of the idol, not knowing that God is manifest in it, then their worship is illicit: they believe that God is the same as the idol.

Al-Nābulusī’s use and interpretations of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* in the commentary are daring. He displays great skill in weaving together different scriptural threads into a new fabric. The method of exegesis is not novel, rather it is the

³⁴ Nettler, RL, ‘The Figure and Truth of Abraham in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fusus al-Hikam*’, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*, 24 (1998), 21-50 (p.46).

interpretation and aims of al-Nābulusī that are noteworthy.³⁵ In this he not only shows creativity vis-à-vis Ibn ʿArabī but also vis-à-vis the tradition of *tafsīr*.³⁶ A notable example of this comes in the chapter on Mūsā where he provides various arguments in support of the validity of Pharaoh’s last minute profession of faith.³⁷

Al-Nābulusī quotes Qur’ān 10:90 which says that Pharaoh professed belief in the God of the Israelites and professed that he was a Muslim/one of those who submit when he was drowning. This profession of faith is in effect the creed of the Israelites. In this context, al-Nābulusī cites Qur’ān 2:132 which he argues was Ibrāhīm’s and Yaʿqūb’s counsel for faith at the moment of death. This counsel is that the sons of Ibrāhīm and Yaʿqūb should only die while being Muslims. Al-Nābulusī argues that grammatically this is a circumstantial phrase (*ḥāl*) simultaneous with the moment of death. From this he infers that professing faith at the moment of death was acceptable

³⁵ Johns, AH, ‘On Qur’ānic Exegetes & Exegesis - a Case Study in the Transmission of Islamic Learning’, in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society*, ed. by PG Riddell & T Street, (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), pp.3-49 (p.17) states that ‘there is potential in works of exegesis for a richness and diversity in the movement of ideas, a shift from theme to theme, the occasional taking up of topics at an unexpected length, all expressive of the free ranging movement of the mind of a teacher addressing a circle of students’. This is true of al-Nābulusī’s approach to both Ibn ʿArabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and to his use of the Qur’ān.

³⁶ Rahbar, D, ‘Reflections’, pp.298 & 306 argues that the entire history of Islam is one of exegesis of the Qur’ān, but laments that Western scholarship has paid inadequate attention to the history of Qur’ānic exegesis. Rippin, A, ‘The Present Status of *Tafsīr* Studies’, *The Muslim World*, 72 (1982), 224-238 (pp.224 & 236) states that there are large gaps in the preliminary studies in *tafsīr* studies, but acknowledges that there has been some focus of attention on Sufi *tafsīr* of the classical period.

³⁷ See Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, pp.96, 106, 158-161, 164, 214, 260, 342n.105, where he mentions and discusses the heated debates in the polemic over Ibn ʿArabī’s orthodoxy concerning his assertion that Pharaoh died a believer. For example, Knysh describes how al-Taftāzānī made the problem of ‘Pharaoh’s faith’ the linchpin of his critique of how Ibn ʿArabī interpreted the Islamic tradition.

to the Israelites, in whose creed Pharaoh professed belief.³⁸ Ibn ʿArabī does not make this point about Pharaoh’s faith and neither do the traditional Qur’ānic *mufasssirūn*.³⁹

Al-Nābulusī’s understanding and use of the Arabic language also merit recognition. For example, in his introduction to his commentary he quotes Qur’ān 3:18 and provides a grammatically based exegesis to explain how there is a single knowledge of God which descends from God to various types of beings.⁴⁰ In the chapter on Muḥammad, al-Nābulusī displays skilful use of scriptural sources and of language when he weaves the light verse (Qur’ān 24:35), various other Qur’ānic verses and *ḥadīths* into a framework showing his understanding of the diversity of creation from a common single source.⁴¹ In the chapter on Ibrāhīm he reveals an adept use of words, where he interprets Qur’ān 13:33 in a very particular manner using the consonantal root association between two nouns (*qiyām* and *qayyūmiyya*).⁴² These

³⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

³⁹ Concerning Qur’ān 2:132, none of the following *tafāsīr* make the point that al-Nābulusī makes - that the act of becoming a Muslim is simultaneous with death, thus justifying the faith of desperation, neither do any of them associate this verse with Qur’ān 10:90: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Egypt: Maimaniyya Press, 1321), I, 417; al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt Tafsīr Ṣūfī Kāmil li’l-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, ed. by Dr I Buyūnī (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī li’l-Ṭibāʿa wa’l-Nashr, n.d.), I, 139-40; al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa-Ḥaqāʾiq al-Taʾwīl* (Cairo: al-Husainiyya, 1343), I, 59-60; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-Tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1987/1407), I, 118-9; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa-ʿUyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Taʾwīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, n.d.), I, 191-2; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masār fī ʿIlm al-Tafsīr* (Damascus & Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī li’l-Ṭibāʿa wa’l-Nashr, 1965/1385), I, 148-9; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Commentary on the Qur’ān*, 6 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1278), I, 516-7; al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa-Asrār al-Taʾwīl* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya al-Kubrā, 1330), I, 190; and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr al-Maʾthūr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990/1411), I, 256.

⁴⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

⁴¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309.

⁴² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 146.

nouns give very different senses to the verse in question which reveal the fresh and original use of traditional techniques of semantic exegesis.

Al-Nābulusī reveals a talented use of narrative when describing and exploring various themes, mundane and metaphysical.⁴³ He frequently uses imagery that is non-literal and mythopoeic in quality. He is not necessarily the creator of this imagery, but uses it in original ways. In the chapter on Zakariyyā when explaining the metaphysical theory of how God's mercy brings everything into existence, he uses a *ḥadīth* which states that God divided mercy into one hundred parts, ninety-nine of which he kept and the hundredth part he sent to earth and with which creation is merciful to itself.⁴⁴

His metaphors are often original and illuminating, as well as at times confusing and puzzling. In the chapter on Ibrāhīm, al-Nābulusī uses the metaphor of letters and words to convey his understanding of the relationship of mutual nourishment between God and creation.⁴⁵ Ibn ʿArabī uses the metaphor of food to convey his understanding of this relationship. Al-Nābulusī elaborates this, but introduces the new metaphor of meanings and words. He states that meanings cannot appear without words while words cannot appear without meanings. In this aspect of language, he also follows in the steps of Ibn ʿArabī and others. In the chapter on Muḥammad, al-Nābulusī cites Qur'ān 108:1 and explains it thus:

⁴³ Riddell, PG. 'The Transmission of Narrative-Based Exegesis', in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society*, ed. by PG Riddell & T Street, (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), pp.57-80 (p.58) suggests that 'Islam depends heavily upon narrative as a device for transmitting messages and morals. Exegetical works upon the Qur'ān often contain lengthy and colourful stories in order to expand, complement or make clear the Qur'ānic text; the second great body of Islamic scripture, the *Ḥadīth* or Traditions of the prophet Muḥammad, are heavily narrative in form'.

⁴⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

⁴⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 165.

God said, 'We have given you abundance (*al-kawthar*).' [Abundance] is a river in Heaven. [The river] is multiplicity (*al-kathra*) in oneness. [The multiplicity] is all the words (*jawāmi' al-kalim*).⁴⁶

Finally, al-Nābulusī's linguistic ability in commenting upon the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is also displayed in his sophisticated legal approach to the formulation of arguments. In the chapter on Mūsā, al-Nābulusī explains that Pharaoh's profession of faith and submission to God is sound and compensates for his previous transgressions and sins. He describes how this refers to the transgressions and sins against God, and not those against other men. He examines the legal issues involved in settling these transgressions against others, concluding that if Pharaoh were sincere in his repentance and had intended to pay his debts then those debts are as good as paid. However, al-Nābulusī also argues that since Pharaoh died at sea after professing faith in God, he died a martyr of the sea. Such a martyr has his transgressions forgiven and his debts settled.⁴⁷

And al-Nābulusī is explicit in explaining that his attempt to comment on and explain the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is an issue of personal religious authority. Whereas Ibn 'Arabī's ideas engendered a polemical debate in the course of time that has not been resolved even at the end of the 20th century, al-Nābulusī is certain that he can resolve this debate.⁴⁸ This polemical debate came to signify a key test of a given Muslim's position in the religious spectrum.⁴⁹ By stating that Ibn 'Arabī was an orthodox figure maligned by notable Muslims of the past, al-Nābulusī put himself at risk. Von

⁴⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309.

⁴⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 279.

⁴⁸ Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi*, covers the history of polemics surrounding Ibn 'Arabī.

Schlegell has argued that al-Nābulusī waged his battles in the concrete setting of an Ottoman Arab society.⁵⁰ These battles brought about very practical repercussions. On the level of ideology he was repeatedly threatened for his views and way of life.⁵¹ In a work of his written in 1680 he penned his ‘conversations with God’ in which he described his concern about what people thought of him. His ‘dialogue’ with God suggests that he sought comfort in the divine responses to his petitions:

I said to Him [God], ‘Oh my Lord! People are doing me wrong!’ He said to me, ‘All of this is a benefit for you. Look at the results of their wronging [you] - it is your closeness to Me. You must be elevated over them.’⁵²

Al-Nābulusī argues that the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is not a work of blasphemy, rather it is a work that describes correctly, fully and with divine sanction the exact relationship of God with man. His approach to this issue is imbued with an air of personal religious authority that suggests that he is writing to establish the veracity of his own religious position:

The reality of belief in God has an appearance in the language (*lisān*) of those who blindly follow, another in the thoughts (*taṣawwur*) of those who are discursive reasoners, and yet another in the witnessing (*shuhūd*) of those who are gnostics. Thus, the phrases and allusions are different and diverse. Each group speaks with what it has. Everyone is right, however they have ranks in the eyes of their Lord. ‘We have raised some of them over others in ranks’ [Qur’ān 43:32]. ... This book which is the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is about the [divine] appearance in the witnessing [of gnostics]. By necessity those who blindly follow and those who reason discursively are ignorant of it and deny of it what they understand of it in accordance with what they say and think.⁵³

He cites Qur’ān 29:43, ‘those parables we have made for people are only understood by those who know’, commenting that in this is an allusion to the fact that

⁴⁹ Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi*, p.1.

⁵⁰ Von Schlegell, ‘Sufism’, p.23. See ‘Chapter 2: The Intellectual Life of al-Nābulusī’ for further details.

⁵¹ Von Schlegell, ‘Sufism’, p.44.

⁵² Al-Nābulusī, *Munāghāt al-Qadīm wa’l-Munāghāt al-Ḥakīm*, Maktabat al-Asad, MS No 5570, fols 16-7 (fol.16^r). This was completed on the 27th Ramaḍān 1091/21st October 1680.

those who do not know ought to follow those who know and understand these parables.⁵⁴

In the chapter on Muḥammad, he describes the different states of understanding the ambiguous relationship between God and His creation:

Many people are destroyed by ignorance. Many are perplexed and stop and are not guided. Many realise [the truth]. Whomsoever God does not give light, will not have light.⁵⁵

These examples show that al-Nābulusī views himself as belonging to the category of those who witness the divine manifestations, who know and understand the parables of the Qur'ān, and who realise the truth. He considers himself, unlike many others, to have received divine light with which he understands and experiences the reality he explains in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and in other works.

The confidence of his personal religious authority is striking in the context of the history of the polemical debates surrounding the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī.⁵⁶ An analysis of al-Nābulusī's understanding of these ideas will provide examples of the cultural, intellectual, and religious activity in the early modern period of the Middle East.

⁵³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁵⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 8.

⁵⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 334.

⁵⁶ Rippin, A. (editor), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.8 indicates that the tendency of Sufi *tafsīr* to locate a source of authority for its positions over against the majority of Sunnī community, which vested its authority in the four *uṣūl*, only very rarely reached the extent of a blatant claim to prophetic status. Al-Nābulusī certainly does not claim to be a prophet.

CHAPTER 2

The Intellectual Life of al-Nābulusī

Al-Nābulusī was born in Damascus on the 7th March 1641 (5th Dhu'l-Hijja, 1050) and died there on the 4th March 1731 (24th Sha'bān, 1143).¹ He lived in an Ottoman society that remained vigorous intellectually throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.² Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of religion, there was concern in the 17th and 18th centuries that Sufism had been debased among the masses and sunk into superstition.³ Furthermore, polemical debates arising in Medieval Islam about aspects

¹ Al-Murādī, MKb.A, *Silk al-Durar*, 2 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1883), II, 31 & 37. Al-Murādī died in 1206/1791 and was a member of one of the leading families of Damascus in the late 17th and 18th centuries. This family played a significant role in the spread of the Naqshbandiyya order in the Ottoman empire. They monopolised the function of mufti for 31 years (1758-1791) along with the position of *khaṭīb* of the Umayyad Mosque. Their success was due to a combination of a strong local power base and the intervention of the Porte. The Murādī family were therefore a prominent notable family with strong Sufi tendencies. This is an important consideration when examining al-Murādī's biographical dictionary. See Gibb, HAR, 'Al-Murādī', in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1993), VII, 602; and Van Leeuwen, R, *Waqfs and Urban Structures - the Case of Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp.130-4. The other biographical dictionary used in this chapter is that of Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Muḥibbī. Brockelmann, C, 'Al-Muḥibbī', in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1993), VII, 469-470, gives the biographies of a number of members of this notable family. Al-Muḥibbī died in 1699/1111. The family held important juridical and teaching positions from one generation to the next.

² Hodgson, MGS, *The Venture of Islam - Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*, 3 vols (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), III, 133. Gerber, H, *State, Society, and Law in Islam - Ottoman Law in Comparative Perspective* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), p.183. Gerber, H, *Islamic Law and Culture 1600-1840* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp.22 & 27-8. This latter work refers, inter alia, to the well received works of the Palestinian mufti Khayr al-Dīn al-Ramlī (d.1081/1671) and the Damascene mufti 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Ḥaṣkafī (d.1088/1677).

³ Sirriyeh, E, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis - The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), p.1.

of Sufism, especially the thought of Ibn ʿArabī, continued to rage throughout this period.⁴ Al-Nābulusī played a part in these religious and intellectual issues of his age.

Al-Nābulusī was born into a well-known and prominent family. His father taught in the Umayyad Mosque, the Salīmiyya *madrasa*, near Ibn ʿArabī's tomb, in the district of Sālihiyya, and the Qaymariyya *madrasa* in Damascus.⁵ It is known that the al-Nābulusī family were explicitly designated the Hanafī teaching appointment in the foundation of Darwīsh Pasha (d.1571/4).⁶ This was initially held by al-Nābulusī's father, then by al-Nābulusī himself, and subsequently by al-Nābulusī's son. Al-Nābulusī's father was a well-travelled man: he visited Anatolia four times, studied in Cairo under various ʿulamāʾ, performed the Hajj, and went to Sidon and Aleppo.⁷ He was renowned for being a *faqīh* and a *sufī*.⁸ It is known that he changed his legal school from Shāfiʿī to Hanafī.⁹

⁴ Knysh, AD, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition - the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp.161-5; and al-Nābulusī, *Al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq wa'l-Khiṭāb al-Ṣādiq*, ed. by B ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn (Damascus: IFEAD, 1995), pp.15-20 & 30.

⁵ Al-Muhibbī, M, *Taʾrīkh Khulāṣat al-Āthār fī Aʿyān al-Qarn al-Hādīʿ Ashar*, 4 vols (Cairo, 1868), I, 408. Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.127 states that one of the main schools in Damascus under the Ottomans was the al-Salīmiyya along with the Umayyad Mosque.

⁶ Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.128.

⁷ Al-Muhibbī, *Taʾrīkh Khulāṣat*, I, 408-10. Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.121 notes that one of the patterns of ʿulamāʾ careers in the 17th and 18th centuries was a high degree of mobility among the ʿulamāʾ, both to acquire knowledge and to enhance career opportunities. He remarks on page 72 that travel was also one of the mainstays of the ʿulamāʾ network in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.

⁸ Al-Muhibbī, *Taʾrīkh Khulāṣat*, I, 408-10.

⁹ Al-Muhibbī, *Taʾrīkh Khulāṣat*, I, 408-10. This point is interesting. Voll, J, 'Old 'Ulama' Families and Ottoman Influence in Eighteenth Century Damascus', *American Journal of Arabic Studies*, 3 (1975), 48-59 (pp.56-7), examines the experience of notable religious families of Damascus in the 17th

Al-Nābulusī attached himself to the Hanafī school as well, presumably inheriting this affiliation from his father.¹⁰ Furthermore, al-Nābulusī, like his father, taught in the Umayyad Mosque and in the Salīmiyya in Ṣālihiyya.¹¹ The al-Nābulusī family maintained a presence in both of these teaching posts from one generation to the next.¹²

It is possible to establish the personal networks within which al-Nābulusī was trained and began his career.¹³ He is known to have studied with at least fifteen scholars.¹⁴ Admittedly, one of these, Sheikh °Alī al-Shubrāmallisī (d.1676/1087), gave

and 18th centuries. He notes a shift of *madhhab* among the old, established religious families from Shāfi'ī to Hanafī. He concludes that this was an indication of growing Ottoman cosmopolitanism since Hanafī affiliation was increasingly necessary for families to maintain influence and compete effectively for posts. One of al-Nābulusī's teachers shifted his affiliation from Shāfi'ī to Hanafī; this was Muḥammad al-Uṣṭuwānī (d.1661-2/1072). See al-Muḥibbī, *Ta'rīkh Khulāṣat*, III, 386-9. Furthermore, Ze'evi, D, *An Ottoman Century - The District of Jerusalem in the 1600s* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp.69-70, states that the biographies of 'ulamā' and other Jerusalem notables transmitted by al-Muḥibbī shed some light on 'the unwritten covenant between the 'ulamā' and the Sufi orders.' He also indicates that 'ulamā' sometimes changed their legal doctrine (*madhhab*).

¹⁰ Al-Murāḍī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 30.

¹¹ Al-Murāḍī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 31-2.

¹² Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.122 argues that another pattern in 'ulamā' careers in the 17th and 18th centuries was that the family was the most important framework for the transfer of positions within the local circuit from one generation to the next. The al-Nābulusī family's experience supports this argument.

¹³ I have to acknowledge a debt for this approach to Humphreys, RS, *Islamic History - A Framework for Inquiry* (London & New York: IB Tauris, 1991), pp.187-192.

¹⁴ Al-Murāḍī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 31. These are (with references to entries in al-Muḥibbī, *Ta'rīkh Khulāṣat* in brackets): his father, d.1652/1062, (I, 408-10); Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī, 1651/1061, (IV, 189-200); Aḥmad al-Qal'ī, d.1657/1067, (I, 327); °Abd al-Bāqī al-Ḥanbalī, d.1661/1071, (no ref.); Muḥammad al-Mahāsīnī, d.1661-2/1072, (III, 408-11); Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Uṣṭuwānī, d.1661-2/1072, (III, 386-389); Muḥammad al-Kurḍī, d.1682-3/1094; Muḥammad al-Kiwāfī, d.1665-6/1076, (III, 404-5); Muḥammad al-°Ithāwī, d.1669-70/1080, (IV, 201-2); °Abd al-Qādir al-Saffūrī, d.1671/1081, (II, 467); Muḥammad b. Ḥamza, d.1674-5/1085, (no ref.); °Alī al-Shubrāmallisī, d.1676/1087, (III, 174-7); Muḥammad Kamāl al-Dīn al-Farḍī, d.1677/1088, (IV, 265); Ibrāhīm al-Fattāl, d.1687/1098 (I, 51-3); Hussain b. Iskandar al-Rūmī, (no ref.).

al-Nābulusī an *ijāza* from Egypt.¹⁵ Al-Nābulusī's formative years were spent with teachers in the most notable *madrasas* in Damascus. Seven of al-Nābulusī's teachers, including his father, had teaching positions in the Umayyad Mosque. Three of them, also including his father, had positions in the Salīmiyya. Both of these were prominent teaching centres.¹⁶

Al-Nābulusī was affiliated to the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. Of his fifteen known teachers, six of them were also Ḥanafīs, four were Shāfi'īs and one was a Ḥanbalī. Of those that were Ḥanafīs, two were known to have changed their affiliation from Shāfi'ī. Al-Nābulusī's personal network in the 17th century displays a slight predominance of Ḥanafī affiliation over that of Shāfi'ī. The four Shāfi'ī affiliates all held teaching posts in various *madrasas*. Of the six Ḥanafī affiliates, it is known that three of them held teaching posts. This supports the view that in the mid-17th/11th century the families who constituted the core of the local religious establishment represent a variety of legal schools.¹⁷

Al-Nābulusī was a prominent Sufi, whose reputation later in life was to draw various people to him for blessings and instruction.¹⁸ He was affiliated to both the

¹⁵ Al-Murāḍī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 31. For details of al-Shubrāmallisī's life, see al-Muhibbī, *Ta'rikh Khulāṣat*, III, 174-7.

¹⁶ Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.127 lists the main schools of Damascus as the al-Sulaymaniyya, al-Nūriyya, al-Zāhiriyya, and *Qubbat al-Naṣr* in the Umayyad Mosque.

¹⁷ Voll, 'Old 'Ulama' Families', p.56.

¹⁸ Al-Murāḍī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 32.

Qādiriyya and Naqshbandiyya *ṭuruq*.¹⁹ He was introduced into these *ṭuruq* by Sheikh al-Sayyid ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ḥamawī al-Kaylānī and Saʿīd al-Balkhī respectively.²⁰ Six of al-Nābulusī’s recognised fifteen teachers were associated with Sufism. Only one of them is known to have had an affiliation; this is Muḥammad al-Kiwāfī who was affiliated with the Qādiriyya as well as the Shāfiʿī school of law. Another, Muḥammad al-Uṣṭuwānī, was known to have defended Ibn ʿArabī from detractors. Almost half the figures who were in al-Nābulusī’s religious and intellectual circle in his formative years were associated in some way with Sufism, but not known to be affiliated to any particular Sufi order.²¹

Al-Nābulusī was appointed to the prestigious position of Ḥanafī Muftī of Damascus in 1722-3.²² He was installed as Muftī on the initiative of the Damascenes.

¹⁹ Al-Murāḍī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 31. Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.127 states that the network of scholars was partially centred around the sheikhs of Sufi orders, especially the Qādiriyya, the Naqshbandiyya and the Khalwatiyya.

²⁰ Al-Murāḍī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 31. Trimingham, JS, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York & Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp.43-44, states that the foundation of the first Qādirī *zāwiya* in Damascus was in the early 15th century and that the Qādiriyya order was only introduced in any definitive fashion into Istanbul through the initiative of Ismāʿīl Rūmī (d.1631/1041 or 1643/1053). On page 97 Trimingham remarks that the Baghdad centre of the Qādiriyya gained the favour of the Ottoman dynasty because of its orthodoxy. With regard to the Naqshbandiyya order, he states, on page 63, that it was important from the Islamic point of view in ensuring the attachment of Turkish peoples to the Sunnī tradition. He notes, on page 95, that, in the Ottoman empire, the Naqshbandī *silsila* was of significance only in Syria and Anatolia.

²¹ Ze’evi, *An Ottoman Century*, pp.70-71 comments with respect to Jerusalem in the 17th century that people who came from prominent Sufi families were members of high standing in the orthodox establishment; indeed, most ʿulamāʾ were members of Sufi groups. With regard to al-Nābulusī’s mentors the fact that there is an absence of evidence for affiliations with Sufi orders does not necessarily indicate evidence of absence.

²² Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.120 describes the function of Ḥanafī Muftī of Damascus as being fully incorporated into the state apparatus under the Ottomans. It was normally an appointment made for

This had to be ratified by the Sheikh al-Islām in Istanbul.²³ For six months al-Nābulusī remained in this position and wrote a corpus of *fatwas*. However, al-Nābulusī may have lost a political battle by proxy in Istanbul.²⁴ The Sheikh al-Islām did not ratify al-Nābulusī's appointment and he was replaced by Muḥammad Khalīl al-Bakrī al-Siddīqī. This new Muftī had actively manoeuvred to dislodge al-Nābulusī from his appointment. This action, which went against the general opinion in Damascus, disappointed many Damascenes.

Al-Nābulusī's social networks suggest an interesting pattern. His father, when in Istanbul, met the Sheikh al-Islām, Yahyā b. Zakariyyā (d.1644) who was an accomplished mystic poet²⁵, and the Sultan's Imām, Yūsuf b. Abī al-Faṭḥ.²⁶ He was also a judge in Sidon for a period of time. Al-Nābulusī's teachers were an interesting social mix. One of them was the *Naqīb al-Ashrāf* in Damascus, another was the rector of Al-Azhar. Two of them were Imāms in Damascus. One of them represented the sufis (*al-fuqarā'*) and various khānqāhs at 'the Ottoman official level'.²⁷ One belonged

life and the holder could therefore develop ties with the local elite. It was normally combined with a professorship at al-Sulaymāniyya and the supervision of the body of *madrassa* teachers.

²³ Rafeq, AK, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus 1723-1783* (Beirut, 1966), p.49.

²⁴ Rafeq, *Ottoman Rule*, pp.81-3. Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.119 states that the interweaving of the 'ulamā' networks in Istanbul and Damascus was sufficient for shifts in the balance of power in the capital to have far-reaching repercussions for appointments in Damascus. Conversely, pressures from Damascus could sometimes secure the appointment of local candidates at the expense of those favoured by the Porte.

²⁵ Zilfi, MC, *The Politics of Piety - The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600-1800)* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988), pp.171-2.

²⁶ Al-Muḥibbī, *Ta'rīkh Khulāṣat*, I, 408-10.

²⁷ It is uncertain what is meant by this term - presumably either the Ottoman apparatus in Damascus or in Istanbul.

to a wealthy family, while another was a *parvenu* who had commercial interests. One of them had a reputation as a collector of real estate and free-holdings. This presents a picture of figures who combined their intellectual and religious interests with more worldly ones. Al-Nābulusī's teachers were not predominantly enclosed in *madrasas* and mosques, but were active in the outside world of politics, commerce and establishment religion.²⁸

Al-Nābulusī is well-known for his travels around the Ottoman empire, thanks mainly to the travel diaries he wrote at the time.²⁹ In 1664-5/1075, he travelled to *Dār al-Khilāfa*, presumably Istanbul. In 1688-9/1100, he visited the Biqā' and Mount

²⁸ This pattern is witnessed in other examples. 'Abbās, I. 'Khair ad-Dīn ar-Ramlī's Fatāwā: A New Light on Life in Palestine in the Eleventh/Seventeenth Century', in *Die Islamische Welt Zwischen Mittelaltes und Neuzeit, Festschrift für Hans Robert Roemer*, ed. by Ulrich Haarmann & Peter Bachman (Beirut: for Steiner (Wiesbaden), 1979), pp.1-19 (p.6) where Khair al-Dīn al-Ramlī, the well-known teacher and muftī, is described as possessing profitable orchards, khāns and other buildings in Ramla. Barnes, JR, *An Introduction to Religious Foundations in the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), p.42, states that from 1600-1800 the number of landed endowments (*awqāf*) grew considerably, the majority of which had become semi-familial *awqāf*: the principal beneficiaries were the founder and his posterity. Gerber, *State, Society and Law*, p.141, argues that the founders of semi-familial *awqāf* had a mixed motive: they sought to take care of their families but also to support institutions meant for the poor. Ze'evi, *An Ottoman Century*, p.82, describes the sources of income for notable families in the *sanjaq* of Jerusalem - *waqf* foundations, various governmental sources of income such as poll tax payments from locally based minorities, well-paying prestigious teaching posts and juridicial positions, tax exemptions, marriage agreements with aspiring merchant families, and investments in commerce. Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.130, notes that the local Damascene 'ulamā' were active in all kinds of real estate transactions, not only as trustees or *nāzirs* of *waqf*, but also as private persons, or, perhaps more accurately, as heads of family households. He also argues on page 125 that certain governors of Damascus tried to secure the co-operation of scholars by founding *waqfs* for them or by using them as representatives to conclude real-estate transactions.

²⁹ Al-Murādī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 32, for details of these journeys. Three of these works have been published. The first journey in al-Munajjid, S, & Wild, S, (eds), *Zwei Beschreibungen des Libanon: 'Abd al-Ganī al-Nābulusī's Reise durch die Biqā' und al-'Utaifīs Reise nach Tripolis* (Wiesbaden, 1979). The third journey in al-Nābulusī, *Al-Ḥaqīqa wa'l-Majāz fī Riḥlat Bilād al-Shām wa-Miṣr wa'l-Ḥijāz*, ed. by RAH Murād (Damascus, 1989). The fourth journey in Busse, H, 'Abd al-Ganī an-Nābulusī's Reisen im Libanon (1100/1689-1112/1700)', *Der Islam* 44 (1968), 71-114. The fourth journey again in Busse, H, (ed.), *Die Reise des 'Abd al-Ganī an-Nābulusī durch den Libanon* (Beirut, 1971). The

Lebanon. Five years later in 1693-4/1105, al-Nābulusī journeyed to Egypt and then to the Hijāz, presumably for the Hajj.³⁰ Finally, in 1700-1/1112, al-Nābulusī went to Levantine Tripoli. The scholarship on some of these works suggests that al-Nābulusī's motives for travelling were partly to seek mystical experience and gain *baraka* by contact with friends of God (*awliyā*)³¹ and partly to visit friends, former students and make new acquaintances.³²

Al-Nābulusī's journeys can be placed in a cultural context by examining the travels of his teachers. At least six of al-Nābulusī's teachers travelled to Cairo and/or Egypt, five of them visited Istanbul and/or Anatolia, three visited Aleppo, two travelled to the Hijāz, and two to Homs. It appears that al-Nābulusī's teachers were in the habit of travel. The cultural place and significance of al-Nābulusī's own journeys should be appreciated in this light: his travels accord with one of the patterns in *ʿulamā*' careers in the 17th and 18th centuries - the high degree of mobility among *ʿulamā*', both to acquire knowledge and to enhance career opportunities.³³

second journey is still in manuscript form. It is al-Nābulusī, *Al-Haḍra al-Unsiyya fī al-Rihla al-Qudsiyya*, Maktabat al-Asad, MS No. 6844, 149 fols.

³⁰ For details of the importance of the pilgrimage in the 17th and 18th centuries see: Faroqhi, S, *Pilgrimages and Sultans, the Hajj under the Ottomans 1517-1683* (London & New York: IB Tauris, 1994); Barbir, KK, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus 1708-1758* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp.133-177; Rafeq, *Ottoman Rule*, pp.52-76.

³¹ Sirriyyah, E, 'Ziyārāt of Syria in a Rihla of ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1050/1641-1143/1731)', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (1979), 109-122 (p.109); Sirriyyah, E, 'The Journeys of ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī in Palestine (1101/1690 & 1105/1693)', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 24 (1979), 55-69 (p.56); and Sirriyeh, E, 'The Mystical Journeys of ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī', *Die Welt des Islams*, 25 (1985), 84-96 (p.96).

³² Al-Munajjid & Wild, *Zwei Beschreibungen*, p.19; & Busse, *Die Reise*, p.29.

³³ Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.121.

Al-Nābulusī's cultural and religious training was dominated by the Islamic sciences. He studied the Qur'ān, including *tafsīr* and *qirā'a*, *ḥadīth* and its auxiliary sciences, *fiqh* along with inheritance laws and arithmetic, and *uṣūl al-fiqh*.³⁴ He also studied the linguistic sciences, which were related to the study of Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*: grammar (*al-naḥw*), rhetoric (*al-ma'ānī wa 'l-tibyān*), and inflection (*al-ṣarf*).³⁵ This fits the general theory of the divisions of Islamic studies described by Ibn Khaldūn in the 14th century.³⁶

Besides the subjects that al-Nābulusī's teachers are known to have taught him, some of them are also known to have taught Sufism, *kalām*, *adab*, and logic.³⁷ Ibn Khaldūn recognised Sufism, *kalām*, and *adab* as branches of knowledge which 'owe their existence to Islam'.³⁸ Together with logic, these were mainstream subjects. That a number of al-Nābulusī's teachers were instructing students in these subjects in the 17th century indicates that they had remained a part of the *madrasa* curriculum since the 14th century when Ibn Khaldūn was writing.³⁹

³⁴ Al-Murādī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 31; and al-Muḥibbī, *Ta'rīkh Khulāṣat*, IV, 265.

³⁵ Al-Murādī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 31.

³⁶ See Makdisi, G, 'Madrasa', in *EI²*, (Leiden: Brill, 1986), v, 1123-1134 (p.1130); and Ibn Khaldūn, *An Introduction to History - The Muqaddimah*, trans. by F Rosenthal (London: Routledge, 1967), pp.344-8, 352-3, 358, 388-9.

³⁷ Al-Muḥibbī, *Ta'rīkh Khulāṣat*, I, 51-3, III, 386-9, IV, 189-200.

³⁸ See Makdisi, 'Madrasa', p.1130; and Ibn Khaldūn, *An Introduction*, pp.348, 352-3, 358, & 360.

³⁹ For further information on the stability of subject areas in the medieval Muslim curriculum see: Dodge, B, *Muslim Education in Medieval Times* (Washington DC: The Middle East Institute, 1962); Nashabi, H, 'Educational Institutions', in *The Islamic City*, ed. by RB Serjeant (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), pp.66-89; Makdisi, G, *The Rise of Colleges - Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981); Sibai, MM, *Mosque Libraries - An Historical Study*

Al-Nābulusī was renowned for his study of Sufism. He was known to have studied the writings of some of the most controversial Sufi figures in the history of Islam: Ibn ʿArabī (d.1240/638), Ibn Sabʿīn (d.1269-71/668 or 669), al-ʿAfīf al-Tilimsānī (d.1291/690), ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d.1428/832), Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d.1235/634), Aḥmad al-Sirhindī (d.1624/1034), and al-Shushtarī (d.1269/668).⁴⁰ None of al-Nābulusī's teachers are known to have studied or commented on any particular Sufi writers of the past, save one: Muḥammad al-Uṣṭuwānī (d.1661-2/1072).⁴¹ He defended the reputation of Ibn ʿArabī from detractors when he was teaching at the *Salīmiyya madrasa* in Damascus.⁴²

Al-Nābulusī was also renowned for his writings on Sufism. His main biographer, al-Murādī, provides a list of two-hundred and one of his works. This list is not in chronological order.⁴³ An analysis of what is known or can be deduced about the subjects of the first twenty works in the list is noteworthy. Eleven of them are

(London & New York: Mansell Publishing, 1987); and Stanton, CM, *Higher Learning in Islam - the Classical Period AD700-1300* (Savage: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990).

⁴⁰ Al-Murādī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 31-33, & 35-36. For further information on these figures in the context of anti-Sufi and anti-Ibn ʿArabī polemics, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.169; and Friedmann, Y, *Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī - An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal & London, 1971), pp.9 & 94-101. Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Furqān Bayn al-Haqq wa'l-Bāṭil*, ed. by K al-Mais (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.), p.151.

⁴¹ Al-Muhibbī, *Ta'rīkh Khulāṣat*, III, 386-9.

⁴² This is to be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

⁴³ For example, the sixth work in the list is al-Nābulusī's *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, which was completed in 1685/1096, whereas the twelfth work in the list, *al-Ma'ārif al-Ghaybiyya*, was completed in 1675/1086. The seventh work, *Kashf al-Sirr al-Ghāmiḍ*, was completed in 1711/1123. Furthermore, the seventeenth work, *Īdāh al-Maqṣūd min Ma'nā Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, was completed in 1680/1091, and the twentieth work, *Miftāḥ al-Ma'iyya*, in 1676/1087.

concerned with Sufism, two with *ḥadīth*, one with exoteric Qur'ānic exegesis, and one with Sufi exegesis of the Qur'ān. Five of them cannot be easily categorised. This suggests that the first twenty works of al-Nābulusī in al-Murādī's list give prominence to explicitly Sufi works. Al-Nābulusī was remembered for his Sufi works according to this list. However, the first three works on this list are concerned with Qur'ānic exegesis and *ḥadīth*.

In 1677/1088, al-Nābulusī wrote a text defending the practice of listening to music.⁴⁴ In 1680/1091, he completed a work defending the belief in the 'Oneness of Existence' (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*).⁴⁵ Following this, in 1682/1092, a text defending the practice of smoking was completed.⁴⁶ In the following year, al-Nābulusī completed a commentary on al-Birgīlī's (d.1573/981) *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*.⁴⁷ This pattern of works indicates that one of al-Nābulusī's concerns between at least 1680 and 1683 was the defence of Sufi related practices, such as listening to music and smoking, and the defence of Sufi beliefs and thought. This pattern is witnessed in the ensuing years when he completed his commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (1685/1096).

⁴⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāh al-Dalālāt fī Samā' al-Ālāt*, ed. by AR Hammūsh (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1981). This is the ninety-seventh work in al-Murādī's list of al-Nābulusī's works.

⁴⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāh al-Maqṣūd min Ma'nā Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, ed. by I Hasrīya (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-ʿIlm, 1969). This is the seventeenth work in al-Murādī's list.

⁴⁶ This is *al-Ṣulḥ bayn al-Ikhwān fī Ḥukm Ibāḥat al-Dukhān*, which is still an unpublished manuscript: Maktabat al-Asad, MS No 8198, fols.54-96. This is the two hundred and first work in al-Murādī's list.

⁴⁷ This is *Al-Ḥadīqa al-Nadiyya - Sharḥ al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*, which is still an unpublished manuscript: MS Ājariyya Madrasa, uncat. This is the fourth work in al-Murādī's list.

On the 21st October 1680/27th Ramaḍān 1091 (Laylat al-Qadr), al-Nābulusī completed a series of dialogues, some of which are ‘with God’, which heralded a period of mystical retreat.⁴⁸ These ‘dialogues with God’ suggest that al-Nābulusī may have been subject to criticism from some of his contemporaries concerning his beliefs:

I said to Him [God], ‘Oh my Lord! People are doing me wrong!’
 He said to me, ‘All of this is a benefit for you. Look at the results of their wronging [you] - it is your closeness to Me. You must be elevated over them.’
 I said to Him, ‘Oh my Lord! I fear that I cry lies about You!’⁴⁹

And,

I said to Him, ‘Oh my Lord! People are crying lies about me over what I claim!’
 He said to me, ‘People claim in themselves what you claim, but they are heedless and veiled [from the Truth]. So, they find lies and measure you against themselves. If only they could find truth in themselves, they would indeed believe you! Whoever believes, will believe. And whoever cries lies, will cry lies.’⁵⁰

Al-Murādī states that early in al-Nābulusī’s life he secluded himself in his house near the Umayyad Mosque for seven years.⁵¹ It is clear from a number of his writings during this period of ‘seclusion’ that al-Nābulusī was not totally withdrawn from society: he completed his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* in 1685/1096 after Friday prayers in the Umayyad Mosque.⁵² During this period, he was subject to bouts of depression and also encountered personal criticism of his actions. According to

⁴⁸ This is *Munāghāt al-Qadīm wa’l-Munāghāt al-Ḥakīm*, which is still an unpublished manuscript: Maktabat al-Asad, MS No 5570, fols.16-7. This is the one hundred and eighty-fourth work in al-Murādī’s list.

⁴⁹ Maktabat al-Asad, MS No 5570, fol.16^r.

⁵⁰ Maktabat al-Asad, MS No 5570, fol.16^r.

⁵¹ Al-Murādī, *Silk al-Durar*, II, 32.

⁵² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, 2 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1304-1323), II, 344.

‘Alā’ al-Dīn and Von Schlegell, it is probable that al-Nābulusī began this period of seclusion when he was composing his series of dialogues in 1680/1091.⁵³

It is uncertain exactly why al-Nābulusī decided to withdraw from wider society. That he was aware of an anti-Sufi movement, of corruption among members of the *fuqahā’*, of corrupt Sufis, and of personal attacks against himself may have influenced his decision. His ‘dialogues with God’ indicate that he may have suffered a crisis of faith concerning his beliefs. The period beginning with these dialogues, *ca.* 1680-6/1091-7, was when al-Nābulusī was preoccupied with defending the practice and beliefs of genuine Sufis from their detractors.

In his work in defence of listening to music three years before in 1677/1088, al-Nābulusī makes comments about contemporary social realities in Damascus. He states that there were attacks on Sufis, specifically against the practice of listening to music and against the concept of ‘friendship of God’ (*al-wilāya*).⁵⁴ In describing how this led to ‘enmity and hatred between people now’ in Damascus, he blames incompetent and ignorant *fuqahā’* for these attacks on Sufism.⁵⁵ However, he makes two further interesting points. Firstly, that such attacks also occurred in the past and, secondly, that these attacks are, to an extent justified, because there are false and corrupt Sufis.⁵⁶

⁵³ Von Schlegell, BR, ‘Sufism in the Ottoman Arab World: Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d.1143/1731)’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1997), p.64; and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, B, ‘‘Abdalḡanī an-Nābulusī (1143/1731) - Oeuvre, Vie et Doctrine’, 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Paris I, 1985), pp.90-3.

⁵⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḡ al-Dalālāt*, pp.22 & 73-5.

⁵⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḡ al-Dalālāt*, pp.20-2.

⁵⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḡ al-Dalālāt*, pp.50-1 & 73-5.

Al-Nābulusī portrays a Damascus in which he was aware of an anti-Sufi movement, stirred up by certain incompetent and ignorant *fuqahā*.⁵⁷ He felt that this movement, which had historical antecedents, had some legitimate complaints against certain proponents of Sufism. However, he argues that these corrupt Sufis should not ruin the reputation of those Sufis who were good Muslims. This is a defence of Sufism and some of its practices against generalised attacks caused by the pretext of the actions of some Sufi extremists. Three years after he wrote this particular work, al-Nābulusī felt a measure of personal criticism for his Sufi beliefs and attitudes as witnessed in his ‘dialogues with God’.

It is probable that the anti-Sufi movement that al-Nābulusī was criticising in some of his works in the late 1670s and 1680s was a remnant of the Kadizadeli movement.⁵⁸ Influenced by the writings of Birgili Mehmed/al-Birgīlī (d.1573/981)⁵⁹, Kadizade Mehmed (d.1635) and his followers, the Kadezadeliler, took up al-Birgīlī’s

⁵⁷ Al-Nābulusī’s nuanced and balanced approach to the issue of anti-Sufi polemics in contemporary Damascus indicates that this is not an example of the *fasād al-zamān* topos. Therefore his statements do not necessarily support the theory of Ottoman decline and corruption. In this respect, Gerber’s comments on Islamic Law in the Ottoman period are pertinent: ‘the widespread notion about the disastrous decline in moral standards of the *ilmiye* (the religious institution in Ottoman parlance) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is probably very exaggerated’ (Gerber, *State, Society, and Law*, p.183) and ‘in the minds of Muslims of the time a distinction existed between the level of theoretical ideology and the practical affairs of the world. *Fasād al-zamān* embodies the Muslim view of history ... yet the muftis in question (Khair al-Dīn al-Ramlī and Ibn ‘Ābidīn) ... demanded integrity from all those around them, certainly thought of themselves as possessing it, and while they seem highly critical of many around them, they nevertheless do not convey the impression that they think their efforts are worthless’ (Gerber, *Islamic Law*, pp.140-1).

⁵⁸ Von Schlegell, ‘Sufism’, pp.22, 63-4, 82-6, & 250.

⁵⁹ Kufrevi, K, ‘Birgewī’, in *EF*² (Leiden: Brill, 1960), I, 1235, states that Birgewi’s full name was Mehmed b. Pīr ‘Alī Birgewī. Two variants of the surname are given - Birgiwī and Birgīlī.

concerns about practices not sanctioned by religious law.⁶⁰ Al-Birgīlī discussed his concerns in the *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*.⁶¹ Among other things, he criticised Sufi dance rituals and venality. That al-Nābulusī wrote a commentary on al-Birgīlī's *Ṭarīqa* in the early 1680s is therefore significant, because he was addressing criticisms against Sufism.⁶²

In the early 17th century, Kadizade's main target was the Sufi movement of the time and the belief system of popular Islam.⁶³ He was critical of wine, tobacco and coffee, all of which were tolerated or used, to a greater or lesser degree, by the Sufis.⁶⁴ His followers directed their anger in particular against the religious music and dances of the Mevlevis.⁶⁵

One of the later Kadizadeli leaders was Muḥammad al-Uṣṭuwānī from Damascus (d.1661-2/1072).⁶⁶ He arrived in Istanbul from Damascus after 1629. He gained a reputation for scholarship and enjoyed success as a mosque lecturer and preacher. He emerged as the most prominent of the Kadizadeli preachers. He was apparently far more dangerous to Sufi interests than Kadizade had been. In the 1650s he 'declared war on the Sufi orders'. However, when Köprülü Mehmed was

⁶⁰ Inalcik, H & Quataert, D (eds), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire - Volume 2: 1600-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.561; Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, pp.131-2. Inalcik *et al* refer to al-Birgīlī with the variant Birgevi. It is clear from the context that this is the same person.

⁶¹ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, pp.144-5.

⁶² See Von Schlegell, 'Sufism', pp.79-94.

⁶³ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, p.132.

⁶⁴ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, p.139.

⁶⁵ Inalcik & Quataert, *An Economic and Social History*, p.561.

⁶⁶ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, pp.140-3. Zilfi refers to him with the Turkish spelling of his name - Üstüvani Mehmed. See al-Muḥibbī, *Ta'rikh Khulāṣat*, III, 386-389 for his biography.

appointed Grand Vezir in 1656, he cracked down on the Kadizadeli movement for encouraging political instability and public disorder.⁶⁷ Al-Uṣṭuwānī was banished to Cyprus.

Muḥammad al-Uṣṭuwānī was also the name of one of al-Nābulusī's teachers.⁶⁸

It appears that al-Nābulusī's teacher was the prominent leader in the Kadizadeli movement of the 1650s in Istanbul. Al-Muḥibbī's account of al-Uṣṭuwānī confirms much of his Kadizadeli involvement, but also suggests that it needs modification.⁶⁹ Al-Uṣṭuwānī was a preacher. He was renowned for being faithful to the *Sharʿa* and for finding faults in others with regard to the *Sharʿa*.

In 1629-30/1039, he left Damascus for Istanbul, where he settled and changed his affiliation from the Shāfiʿī to the Ḥanafī school of law.⁷⁰ While on the pilgrimage in 1652-3/1063, he visited Damascus. He became the preacher (*wāʿiẓ*) in the mosque of Sultan Abū'l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad Khān in Istanbul.⁷¹ His eloquent preaching attracted

⁶⁷ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, pp.146-7.

⁶⁸ Al-Muḥibbī, *Ta'rīkh Khulāṣat*, III, 386-9.

⁶⁹ Von Schlegell, 'Sufism', p.82 mentions an example of the Kadizadeli reformers' actions - in 1062/1657 the Kadizadeli 'Üstüvani Mehmed' gained the backing of Grand Wazir Melik Ahmad Pasha (d.1073/1662) to tear down the Khalwati tekke at Demirkapi and he urged his followers to strike down visitors to other tekkes. Although she acknowledges that 'Üstüvani Mehmed' was originally from Damascus, von Schlegell does not realise that he is the al-Uṣṭuwānī who taught al-Nābulusī.

⁷⁰ Voll, 'Old 'Ulama' Families', pp.56-7, notes a shift of *madhhab* among the old, established religious families from Shāfiʿī to Ḥanafī. He concludes that the Ḥanafī affiliation was increasingly necessary under the Ottomans for families to maintain influence and compete effectively for posts. Al-Uṣṭuwānī's shift of *madhhab* and his migration to Istanbul indicate that his career fits some of the patterns in 'ulamā' careers in the 17th and 18th centuries: see Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, pp.106 & 121-2.

⁷¹ According to Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, p.141, this was a prominent location of Kadizadeli turbulence, despite its fifth-place imperial rank.

many followers, including those of Qāḍī Zādeh al-Rūmī (the Kadezadeliler). They went to extremes in forbidding things, which almost led to civil strife in 1656-7/1067, and consequently he was banished to Cyprus and then Damascus.

In Damascus, he assumed a teaching position in the Umayyad Mosque where he was very popular with both scholars and ordinary people. He was active in forbidding various objectionable actions, giving orders to his followers to beat people who were caught doing such things. However, when he took up a teaching position at the Salīmiyya *madrassa* in Damascus, he defended the reputation of Ibn ʿArabī from detractors.

That al-Uṣṭuwānī who taught al-Nābulusī was the prominent Kadizadeli preacher and leader appears to be borne out by al-Muhibbī. It is noteworthy that when he returned to Damascus from Istanbul for the last time in 1656/7, he assumed teaching positions in the Umayyad Mosque and in the Salīmiyya *madrassa*. These were two of the main teaching locations in Damascus.⁷² He gathered a following who were willing to attack those whose actions al-Uṣṭuwānī criticised in his preaching. It is likely that this was a continuation of the Kadizadeli movement in Istanbul.

It is significant that al-Uṣṭuwānī defended Ibn ʿArabī against the criticisms levelled against him in the late 1650s in Damascus as this indicates an apparently contradictory personality. Zilfi argues that the Kadizadelis made of Ibn ʿArabī a test of

⁷² Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, p.127.

orthodoxy.⁷³ However, al-Muḥibbī indicates that the most prominent figurehead of this anti-Sufi movement in the mid 17th century was a defender of Ibn ʿArabī. This may suggest that whereas al-Uṣṭuwānī was enthusiastic to criticise and act against extreme Sufi practices and movements, he did not attack Sufism itself. It may be that al-Uṣṭuwānī was motivated more by a drive against corruption and less by pure anti-Sufi sentiment. He also appears to have had his own economic position and prestige to enhance. Furthermore, this Kadizadeli leader taught the young al-Nābulusī, an outspoken and famous supporter of Ibn ʿArabī. Al-Nābulusī, in his turn, criticised corrupt and extreme Sufis, while defending those who were true to the *Sharīʿa*.⁷⁴

There was a Kadizadeli revival under the leadership of Mehmed ibn Bistam of Van, ‘Vani’ Mehmed (d.1685).⁷⁵ He was as antagonistic to the Sufis as his Kadizadeli predecessors. In 1665 he had public performances of Sufi music and ‘dance’ rituals forbidden. He accused the Sufis of the usual sins of abetting unbelief and ignoring the law. A few years later the prohibition of smoking was also renewed.⁷⁶ Vani’s fortunes turned with the Ottoman debacle at Vienna in 1683.⁷⁷ He had accompanied the army to the front, and was consequently banished until he died in 1685. Within a year of his disgrace permission to perform Sufi music and ‘dance’ rituals was restored.⁷⁸

⁷³ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, pp.136-7.

⁷⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḥ al-Dalālāt*, pp.73-5.

⁷⁵ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, pp.147-9.

⁷⁶ This was the period in which al-Nābulusī was writing in defence of various Sufi practices.

⁷⁷ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, p.157; Inalcik & Quataert, *An Economic and Social History*, p.561.

⁷⁸ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, p.158.

That al-Nābulusī accused the *fuqahā* of the anti-Sufi movement in Damascus of ignorance, incompetence and ‘love of this world and vanities’ is significant.⁷⁹ The Kadizadeli movement was, in many respects, a drive to confront the challenge that the Sufis posed to the regular mosque preacher career.⁸⁰ Neither al-Uṣṭuwānī nor Vani was trained in the central *madrasa* system. They represented the less remunerative mosque preacher career line. Al-Murādī remarks that al-Uṣṭuwānī was a preacher. The largest and most prestigious mosques were as likely to be assigned to a Sufi as to a preacher.⁸¹ The Kadizadelis appear to have been both a conscientious religious protest as well as a manifestation of economic rivalry in religious garb.⁸² Al-Uṣṭuwānī was successful in Istanbul in acquiring a position in the Sultan Abū’l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad Khān mosque in Istanbul probably thanks to his association with the Grand Wazir at the time. When he was exiled to Damascus, he assumed teaching and preaching positions in two of the prominent *madrasas* in the city which suggests that he still had some influential patrons both in Istanbul and Damascus.⁸³ Furthermore, al-Nābulusī’s writings of the late 1670s suggest that economic competition may have been the

⁷⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāh al-Dalālāt*, pp.17-8.

⁸⁰ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, p.163.

⁸¹ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, p.166.

⁸² Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, p.167.

⁸³ Van Leeuwen, *Waqfs*, pp.119 & 150, remarks that the al-Uṣṭuwānīs gained a quasi-monopoly over the function of *khaṭīb* of the Umayyad Mosque, noting that the main families, who had access to the most important functions, derived their status not only from their power base in Damascus, but also from their ties with factions in Istanbul.

underlying motivation for the *fuqahā*' leadership of the anti-Sufi movement in Damascus in the 1670s and early 1680s.⁸⁴

Criticisms of Ibn ʿArabī were certainly aired in the late 1650s in Damascus, when al-Uṣṭuwānī defended his reputation. It appears that in the 17th century the Kadizadelis attempted to gauge the degree of people's orthodoxy by discovering people's views about Ibn ʿArabī.⁸⁵ Those who used him as an authority or recited his verse were considered by some to be heretics. That al-Nābulusī wrote a text defending Ibn ʿArabī's concept of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in 1680/1091 is significant.⁸⁶ He reveals an awareness of the ongoing polemic concerning *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* which had been discussed by the ʿulamā' of the past as well as those of more recent times, having read many works by recent scholars about this subject.⁸⁷

For al-Nābulusī, the statements of Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, al-Tilimsānī, Ibn Sabʿīn and ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī do not contradict the beliefs of Orthodox Muslims (*ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamāʿa*).⁸⁸ Furthermore, in a possible reference to Kadizadeli leaders, he states that it is only those people who are more concerned with acquiring

⁸⁴ Von Schlegell, 'Sufism', p.83 compares Inalcik who sees the conflict with the Kadizadeliler and their opponents as an ideological one between fanaticism and tolerance with Zilfi who points to social and economic factors. See Inalcik & Quataert, *An Economic and Social History*, p.606 where it is suggested that certain disputes which involve competing factions contain an element of economic rivalry as well; this appears to apply to aspects of the Kadizadeli movement.

⁸⁵ Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, pp.136-7.

⁸⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḥ al-Maqṣūd*.

⁸⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḥ al-Maqṣūd*, pp.6. & 21.

⁸⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḥ al-Maqṣūd*, p.6.

official posts and the ‘vanities of the world’ who refute *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*.⁸⁹ He adds that those false Sufis who misunderstand and misstate *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* deserve the censure they receive from exoteric ‘ulamā’ and from genuine Sufis.⁹⁰

During his period of seclusion from wider society, al-Nābulusī corresponded with people in various locations.⁹¹ In 1683/1094, he discussed with a correspondent near Istanbul al-Taftāzānī’s (d.ca. 1389) attitudes towards Ibn ‘Arabī.⁹² In 1686/1097, a correspondent from Nablus also discussed with al-Nābulusī these attitudes of al-Taftāzānī. Al-Taftāzānī wrote a work entitled *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*⁹³ which is critical of Ibn ‘Arabī and those who profess *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*.⁹⁴

One of al-Taftāzānī’s students, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī (d. 1437/841), wrote *Faḍīḥat al-Mulḥidīn wa-Naṣīḥat al-Muwaḥḥadīn*, which reflects his teacher’s anti-Ibn ‘Arabī teaching.⁹⁵ It is probable that al-Nābulusī was not only aware of this particular Ibn ‘Arabī polemic, but wrote against it in his *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq wa’-Khiṭāb al-Ṣidq*,

⁸⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḥ al-Maqṣūd*, p.7.

⁹⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḥ al-Maqṣūd*, p.17.

⁹¹ Al-Nābulusī, *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq*, pp.19-20.

⁹² Al-Nābulusī, *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq*, p.19.

⁹³ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyya al-Azhariyya, n.d.).

⁹⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq*, p.26. See Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī*, p.147, who argues that al-Taftāzānī held a nuanced attitude towards Sufism; he made a distinction between ‘sound’ elements of Sufi theory and practice and the ‘pernicious’ elements such as Ibn ‘Arabī’s theories.

⁹⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq*, pp.15-25. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī*, pp.204-5.

completed in 1693/1104.⁹⁶ This indicates that al-Nābulusī was aware of the anti-Ibn ʿArabī polemics from the preceding centuries.

Both al-Taftāzānī and al-Bukhārī were influenced by Ibn Taymiyya (d.728/1328).⁹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya launched a comprehensive critical attack on Ibn ʿArabī, which made him the most implacable and important opponent of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers.⁹⁸ The account of the origins, beliefs, and implications of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* within Islam was a recurrent subject of Ibn Taymiyya's controversialist work: much of his polemic is a presentation of the principal themes of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* and argumentation to show their incompatibility with the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*.⁹⁹

Although sympathetic towards Sufism, Ibn Khaldūn (d.1406/808), like Ibn Taymiyya, did not care for the metaphysics of the later Sufis who espoused *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*.¹⁰⁰ Claiming that Sufism belongs to the sciences of the religious law that originated in Islam, Ibn Khaldūn criticises recent 'extremist Sufis', who speak about ecstatic experiences, and who have confused the problems of metaphysics and *kalām* with their own discipline.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq*, pp.30-1.

⁹⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq*, p.15. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.205.

⁹⁸ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.87. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Furqān*; and Ibn Taymiyya, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity - Ibn Taymiyya's Al-Jawab al-Sahih*, ed. & trans. by TF Michel, S.J. (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1984).

⁹⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, p.6.

¹⁰⁰ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.189. Ibn Khaldūn, *An Introduction*, pp.85-7, 358-67.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *An Introduction*, pp. 358 & 390.

By the time of al-Taftāzānī and his student, al-Bukhārī, in the late 14th and early 15th centuries the polemics concerning Ibn ʿArabī had been raging for at least one hundred years. Fifty years later, in the late 15th century, Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʾī (d.1480/885) paraphrased al-Bukhārī's refutation of Ibn ʿArabī in a number of works.¹⁰² One hundred years later, the Egyptian Sufi, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d.1565/973), wrote a book in defence of Ibn ʿArabī, in which he noted the main points of the enduring polemical dispute.¹⁰³ It is known that al-Nābulusī was aware of this particular work of al-Shaʿrānī.¹⁰⁴ Thus, not only was he aware of al-Taftāzānī's criticisms of Ibn ʿArabī, he was probably also aware of al-Shaʿrānī's summary of the polemical issues concerning Ibn ʿArabī.

It is possible to view al-Nābulusī's commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* in two contexts. Firstly, that al-Nābulusī was aware of an anti-Sufi movement in the mid- to late-seventeenth century is certain. He was active in writing against corrupt and extreme Sufis who were discrediting those who were genuine and devout Muslims. Although critical of these corrupt Sufis, he also accused the leaders of the anti-Sufi movement of being equally corrupt and venal. He agreed with some of their complaints against certain Sufis, while criticising them for improper motivations.

¹⁰² Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.212.

¹⁰³ Al-Shaʿrānī, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb al-Yawāqīt wa'l-Jawāhir fī Bayān ʿAqā'id al-Akābir* (Cairo: Būlāq, 1890), pp.13-4.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300.

Secondly, al-Nābulusī was aware of the history of polemics concerning Ibn ʿArabī in the Islamic tradition. This was not a debate rooted solely in the past, rather it had relevance to the realities of 17th century Damascus. Criticisms of Ibn ʿArabī had been raised throughout the 17th century and al-Nābulusī was aware of various works both in praise and criticism of Ibn ʿArabī. Al-Nābulusī wrote a number of works in defence of Ibn ʿArabī's Sufi ideas, notably his commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

CHAPTER 3

Al-Nābulusī's Introduction to the Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall

Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ

Introduction

This chapter will examine al-Nābulusī's stated intentions for writing his commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and it will also present an analysis of the assumptions underlying his intentions.

In brief, the point that al-Nābulusī intends to make is that none of the commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* written until his time are of use in explaining it correctly to either its opponents or to Sufi novices. He opines that there is a need for a 'correct' explanation of this work. This is his fundamental intention.

To support this argument, he describes how there are different types of people who possess different means of understanding the world and of believing in God. From this typology he explains how the one God can appear differently to different types of people.¹ These different appearances may lead to dogmatic clashes between different types of people, despite the fact that they all believe in the same one God. He proposes that the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* concerns the faith of one specific type of person only. He argues that there is a need for an interpreter who knows the beliefs and

¹ See the chapter on Hārūn in this thesis which discusses specifically the issue of God appearing in the manifold forms of the created world.

manners of expression of the different types of people. This interpreter can be the mediator through whom the meanings of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* may pass from the recondite original text into the language of one of the types of people who have difficulties in understanding it correctly. Al-Nābulusī proposes himself as this interpreter and states that he will rely upon God for inspiration in understanding the text and in interpreting it.

Other Commentaries and their Readership

Al-Nābulusī does recognise the existence of other commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. However, he states that there are problems with these commentaries. Their expressions and allusions are said to be difficult and obscure.² No names of authors and no quotations are given to support al-Nābulusī's generalisations about the tradition of commentaries.³ At the end of his commentary, he remarks that he made no use of these works in 'writing' his own.⁴

The difficulties and obscurities of these commentaries do not help those who are incompetent (*al-qāṣirūn*) or who are Sufi novices (*ahl al-bidāyah*) when they read the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.⁵ Al-Nābulusī implies that neither of these groups of people

² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, 2 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1304-1323), I, 2.

³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 2.

⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 344.

⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 2. Al-Nābulusī offers no information about whom these incompetent people and novices might have been. Consequently, it is unwise to speculate how wide he intended his audience to be and what the composition of that audience might have been. Only generic labels for various groups have been provided. All that can be said is that there is the impression that he is writing for a literate, erudite audience whose preconceptions towards Sufism may have varied according to their prejudices. This sort of audience may be divided into the Sufi elite - masters and novices, non-Sufi theologians, philosophers, and other thinkers, and educated ordinary people.

benefit from the commentaries. The only people who can benefit from these commentaries are the great masters who possess mystical insight:

Its commentaries ...are hardly ever of benefit to anyone save the great masters who possess mystical experience (*ahl al-adhwāq*).⁶

Al-Nābulusī intends to produce a commentary that will clarify what is obscure in Ibn ʿArabī's text and to provide elaborate discussions of various themes that are dealt with concisely in it.⁷ He hopes that he will be able to do this with the clearest words possible and in accordance with divine inspiration and revelation.⁸

Al-Nābulusī's stated intention to clarify the difficulties of one of the great Sufi texts suggests that he saw himself as one of the great masters who have mystical insight into this text and its commentaries. The implication of this is that it is mystical insight (*dhawq*) that enables him to understand the difficulties and obscurities in these texts.⁹ His intention in the commentary is to impart his understanding to those who are incompetent and those who are novices. It follows that his intended audience is these two groups of people. He is not intent upon providing a commentary for other Sufi great masters who possess mystical insight.

Furthermore, on page 42, al-Nābulusī confirms that when he mentions 'the people of the beginning' he is referring to Sufi novices. In this later context, he refers to 'the people of the middle' and 'the people of the end.' The latter group are associated with 'self-manifestation' and 'veiling', 'survival' and 'annihilation'. These terms are all raised by al-Nābulusī throughout his commentary when discussing the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. They will appear in this chapter, as well as others such as that of Ibrāhīm and Hārūn.

⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 2.

⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 2.

⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 2.

⁹ This understanding is said to be imparted to him from God. Reference has already been made to the fact that al-Nābulusī states that it is God who confided the commentary to him. Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301, states that the Sufi masters, that is to say those who possess the faculties of unveiling (*kashf*) and insight (*baṣīra*) and whose hearts have been exorcised through spiritual exercises, have no doubts

Al-Nābulusī is explicit in communicating his certainty that he can convey his ‘correct’ understanding of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and that the earlier commentaries failed in this. He is confident that those who think well of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* as well as those who think badly of it will be receptive to his commentary and will modify their thoughts accordingly. Al-Nābulusī assumes that those who are incompetent and those who are novices actually want to understand the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* in the way that he himself deems to be correct. He does not address the issue that some of the members of these groups might not want to understand the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* in the same way as him. Al-Nābulusī’s assumption here is that he will find a receptive audience for his commentary of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

Al-Nābulusī has offered an image of the reception of Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas in his time and place. By the 1190s/1680s, Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* was, in al-Nābulusī’s opinion, encountering various problems of reception. None of the commentaries written over the previous centuries had helped to mitigate or resolve these problems. They were written for specialised audiences - the Sufi masters - who could probably dispense with them anyway. Al-Nābulusī counts himself as one of these masters. However, he perceived that there was a need to make it easier for other less able types of person to understand the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. It is with these less able types of people that he is concerned in providing the commentary.

at all on any issue. He admits, though, that they are limited in what they can say publicly by the time and place in which they live.

There is the impression that al-Nābulusī viewed the world as being full of people who were incompetent in understanding Ibn ʿArabī's ideas and with inexperienced Sufis who also had problems with these ideas. This typological abstraction of the world may have been arrived at from al-Nābulusī's own experiences with both types of person. He may well have known a number of Sufi novices whose instruction in the texts of Ibn ʿArabī, particularly the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, was his responsibility. It is known that he taught the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* to a number of close disciples during his retreat.¹⁰ It is also known from a number of his works written around the same time as his commentary that he was critical of various classes of people.¹¹

Furthermore, it is also known that he wrote a number of works defending the ideas of Ibn ʿArabī against unnamed opponents.¹² Al-Nābulusī places these opponents in two contexts: the context of the past and the context of the present. Al-Nābulusī was aware of an anti-Ibn ʿArabī literature and tradition coming from the past and

¹⁰ Von Schlegell, BR, 'Sufism in the Ottoman Arab World: Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d.1143/1731)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1997), p.72.

¹¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāḥ al-Dalālāt fī Samāʾ al-Ālāt*, ed. by AR Hammūsh (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), pp.46-7, where he describes the *fuqahā'* and the commonality of people in Damascus in the 1670s as possessing evil intentions and goals. He puts them in the same league as iniquitous and slanderous people. Al-Nābulusī is not just talking about an abstract view of the world; it seems that his own personal experience led to such strongly worded descriptions. Furthermore, in the course of this particular text he rails against those who indulge in wild generalisations about other types of people. In the light of this, one has to wonder whether he follows his own advice or whether his comments are largely true.

¹² See the chapter on al-Nābulusī's biography for details of these. A number of them were written during al-Nābulusī's seven year Sufi retreat.

existent in his day.¹³ Thus, in clarifying and explaining various concepts and expressions, al-Nābulusī may well be responding to charges levelled at Ibn ʿArabī both in the past and in his own day.¹⁴

Al-Nābulusī's Classification of Mankind according to Epistemology and Faith

Having established three categories of people so far - the great Sufi masters who possess mystical insight, Sufi novices and the incompetent who might be opponents of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* - al-Nābulusī moves on to a lengthy discourse that elaborates another three categories of people - blind imitators and the incompetent, theologians and philosophers, and gnostics who have mystical experiences.¹⁵ It appears that there is some degree of overlap between these two sets of three categories.

¹³ Al-Nābulusī, *Īdāh al-Maqṣūd min Maʿnā Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, ed. by I Hasrīya (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿIlm, 1969). This work was written in 1090/1680.

¹⁴ See the chapter on al-Nābulusī's biography for an appreciation of al-Nābulusī's awareness of the anti-Ibn ʿArabī polemics. See Knysh, AD, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition - the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999) for a good survey of the polemics surrounding Ibn ʿArabī.

¹⁵ Here and throughout the thesis I shall refer to ʿĀrif as gnostic and *maʿrifā* as gnosis. Arnaldez, R, 'Maʿrifā', in *Elʿ* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), vi, 568-571, prefers the term cognition for *maʿrifā*. He concludes (p.571) that it is a misuse to definitely translate *maʿrifā* automatically as 'gnosis'. Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. by RA Nicholson (Leiden: Brill, 1911), p.267, states: 'Gnosis of God [*maʿrifat Allah*] is of two kinds: cognitional (*ʿilm*) and emotional (*ḥāl*). ... Gnosis is the life of the heart through God, and the turning away of one's inmost thoughts from all that is not God. The worth of everyone is in proportion to gnosis, and he who is without gnosis is worth nothing. Theologians, lawyers, and other classes of men give the name of gnosis (*maʿrifat*) to right cognition (*ʿilm*) of God, but the Sufi Shaykhs call right feeling (*ḥāl*) towards God by that name. Hence they have said that gnosis (*maʿrifat*) is more excellent than cognition (*ʿilm*), for right feeling (*ḥāl*) is the result of right cognition, but right cognition is not the same thing as right feeling, i.e. one who has not cognition of God is not a gnostic (*ʿārif*), but one may have cognition of God without being a gnostic.' Furthermore, Baldick, J, *Mystical Islam - an Introduction to Islam* (London: IB Tauris, 1989), pp.7-8, reveals a sensitivity to avoiding Christian terms when approaching Islam and Sufism, however, when he discusses *maʿrifā* (pages 35, 38, & 61) he uses the term 'gnosis'.

There are two different sets of criteria that determine the composition of the new set of three categories or groups of people. One set of criteria pertains to different types of knowledge - doctrine/speech (*qawl*), intellectual understanding (*fahm*), and witnessing (*shuhūd*). The other set pertains to different types of faith - through language, through reasoning, and through witnessing. He states that:

Faith in God, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and faith in Laws and Judgements is divided into three parts.¹⁶

The types of faith are linked to the types of knowledge. Al-Nābulusī not only describes the new set of three groups in terms of these sets of criteria, he also explains the interactions between them and to which of these new groups the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* specifically relates. The blind imitators and incompetent are very limited in their knowledge and faith. They merely utter prayers and statements of belief without understanding them. Philosophers and theologians attempt to understand what they know and what they believe and in doing so rely upon their intellectual understanding and their doctrine. They encompass the knowledge and faith of the blind imitators. The gnostics have also enjoyed the fruits of doctrine and intellectual understanding, but have transcended these to experience their knowledge and faith through an ineffable state of witnessing. Their experience is denied to the philosophers, theologians and blind imitators. It is to the category of gnostics that the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* relates.

The first group he discusses is that of the 'blind imitators' (*al-muqallidūn*):

The knowledge of doctrine (*al-qawl*) belongs to the blind imitators and those who are incompetent (*al-qāṣirīn*). ... The faith of the blind imitator is through doctrine only with heart-felt trust in it without any intellectual understanding.¹⁷

¹⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

These people are by nature very limited in what they can understand and apprehend. They trust in their faith and in what they hear or read without understanding it.

Al-Nābulusī provides two Qur’ānic verses to support the existence of this type of faith (the sections quoted by al-Nābulusī are in italics):

*Say, ‘We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Ibrāhīm, Ismā‘īl, Ishāq, Ya‘qūb, and the tribes, and that given to Mūsā and ‘Īsā, and that given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between one and another of them. We bow to God (in Islam)’ [Qur’ān 2:136].*¹⁸

And,

*Say, ‘He is God, the one and only; God, the eternal, absolute; He does not beget, nor is He begotten; and there is none like Him’ [Qur’ān 112].*¹⁹

Both of these verses commence with the order to ‘Say!’ (*qul!*) what is commanded. The doctrine/speech (*qawl*) is important. The form of the Qur’ānic statement is being stressed. The fact that the believer is being commanded ‘to say’ things appears to be the key here. The intellectual understanding of what is said is not stressed. Believers should exhibit heart-felt trust in what they are being asked to say because it is a command from God and the words they will say are also from God.

Secondly, the content of these verses may also be relevant. The first Qur’ānic quotation (Qur’ān 2:136) presents a ritual statement about belief in God without describing or explaining it. The very fact of belief in God and His revelation is

¹⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 3.

¹⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 3.

paramount. There is an allusion to the aspect of different prophets believing in God and having a revelation from Him. Although they each had different revelations, no difference is made between them. Qur'ān 112 is simply an affirmation of the *tawḥīd* of God.

Thirdly, the juxtaposition of these verses is noteworthy. Qur'ān 2:136 stresses God's reception among man and how He transmits different revelations to different men. Qur'ān 112 stresses the utter oneness of God. Both these verses demand a trust in their descriptive and prescriptive statements, without expecting any intellectual understanding of them.

For al-Nābulusī these two verses are support for his contention that a certain type of people does not understand what it believes, but does trust in its truth. These people blindly follow the words they hear and say without understanding them.

The second group which al-Nābulusī discusses is 'the learned people of the traditional religious sciences who employ discursive reasoning' (*al-nāẓirūn wa'l-mustadillūn*):

The knowledge of intellectual (*al-fahm*) understanding belongs to those who use discursive reasoning. ... The faith of those who reason is through intellectual understanding with doctrine (*al-qawl*) only.²⁰

This group of people, like the first group, have heart-felt trust in what they believe, while at the same time attempting to examine and understand it. It seems that

¹⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 3. Al-Nābulusī tells us that this verse was specifically addressed to Muḥammad.

²⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 3.

this group of people is composed of theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and philosophers (*falāsifah*).²¹

Al-Nābulusī provides two Qur'ānic verses to support the existence of this class of people (the sections quoted by al-Nābulusī are in italics):

Say, 'Examine what is in the heavens and in the earth.' Neither the signs nor the warnings will benefit those who do not believe [Qur'ān 10:101].²²

And,

Do they not look at what God has created? Their shadows turn around from the right to the left, prostrating themselves humbly to God [Qur'ān 16:48].²³

Al-Nābulusī uses these two verses to support his view that a certain type of people examines what it believes, while believing and trusting in its truth. These people examine and look at the doctrine of revelation. Through this examination, they attempt to understand the heavens, the earth and God's creation. It follows that they also attempt to understand God intellectually through what He has said about Himself. Thus, whereas with the first group of believers which believes in the one God who transmitted different revelations to different prophets without understanding what that

²¹ In the chapter on Zakariyyā, al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 224, discusses the contention that God is the same as His attributes. He states that 'al-Ash'arī, one of the scholars of Kalām, said that God is not the same as an attribute which belongs to Him nor is He other than it. ... He could not deny the attributes of Him entirely because they appear in Revelation and that would entail denying Revelation which is unbelief. Neither could he make the divine attributes the same as God because that statement along with the affirmation that the attributes belong to God requires a mystical experience of unveiling (*dhawq kashfī*) and witnessing (*mu'āyana*), but he was one of the people of intellection and rationality (*ahl al-afkār wa'l-anzār al-^caqliyya*). Furthermore, that [statement] would not be possible for him unless he had to deny the attributes like the school of philosophers (*madhhab al-falāsifa*), which is unbelief too.' This reveals that al-Nābulusī associates those who use discursive reasoning with both theologians and philosophers.

²² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

actually means, this group attempts to understand the revelation they receive from God.

Al-Nābulusī also mentions that the studies of these two types of people are performed by their *‘ulamā’*.²⁴ This suggests that in al-Nābulusī’s eyes there are *‘ulamā’* belonging to both classes of people. There is nothing in his use of the term *‘ulamā’* to suggest that it is anything more than a broadly defined term indicating someone who is knowledgeable in a certain subject. Thus, there were *‘ulamā’* or knowledgeable people who blindly followed the doctrine found in revelation. Equally, there were other *‘ulamā’* who examined the doctrine of revelation and attempted to understand it intellectually. On the other hand, there are those people who blindly follow the doctrine of revelation while not becoming *‘ulamā’*. Similarly, if one follows the logic of al-Nābulusī’s paradigm of groups of people, there are those who examine the doctrine of revelation and attempt to understand it intellectually, while not becoming *‘ulamā’*.

These two groups of people appear to encompass the incompetent and the Sufi novices mentioned earlier, neither of whom are said to possess mystical experience (*dhawq*). Al-Nābulusī also mentions that he has written various books about the faith of these two types of people, but does not consider it pertinent to elaborate this theme in the present context.²⁵ Indeed, he does not even mention any of the titles of these

²³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

²⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

²⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

works. Nevertheless, it seems to have been a subject about which he held strong views.²⁶

The final group of people are those whom al-Nābulusī calls ‘the gnostics who have mystical insights’ (*al-‘ārifūn al-dhā’iqūn*). He has already stated that the people who mostly benefit from the commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* are the great masters who possess mystical insight.²⁷ It follows that these great masters belong to this third group. It is also the case that al-Nābulusī sees himself as belonging to this group.

This group of people are described as actually ‘witnessing’ the things that the other two groups either blindly follow or attempt to understand.

The knowledge of witnessing (*al-shuhūd*) belongs to the mystics who have mystical experience (*al-‘ārifūn al-dhā’iqūn*). ... The faith of the gnostics which is through witnessing only, after doctrine (*al-qawl*) and intellectual understanding (*al-fahm*).²⁸

They have heart-felt trust in what they believe. They have attempted to understand and draw conclusions about their beliefs. Furthermore, having done this, they are said to have transcended these types of faith and have actually ‘witnessed’ the things in which they have blindly trusted and which they have attempted to understand.

Al-Nābulusī provides Qur’ānic support to prove that this type of faith is real (the sections quoted by al-Nābulusī are in italics):

*God has witnessed that there is no god but He. The angels and those in possession of knowledge standing firm on justice [also witnessed that there is no god but He]. There is no god but He, exalted in power, and wise [Qur’ān 3:18].*²⁹

²⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3. See the chapter on al-Nābulusī’s biography for further details of his other writings.

²⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 2.

²⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

This is a particularly important Qur'ānic verse for al-Nābulusī and, unlike the other verses adduced so far, he provides a detailed exegesis. He focuses on the verb 'to witness' (*shahida*), while recognising that there are other aspects of the verse worthy of exegesis. Unfortunately, these other aspects are left untouched.

He states that there is only one act of 'witnessing' (*al-shahāda*) mentioned in the verse; however, it is predicated of three 'realities' (*ḥaqā'iq*), viz. God, angels, the possessors of knowledge, which are all the subject of the sentence.³⁰

The act of witnessing is predicated of God firstly, and then this act lowers itself to the angels and then to the possessor of knowledge.³¹

Al-Nābulusī is highlighting the importance of the fact that there is only one act of 'witnessing'. He uses the standard grammatical language to indicate that this is predicated of God first of all who is the first subject of the verbal sentence. The 'witnessing' is then revealed (*tanazzalat*) to the angels and then to those in possession of knowledge.³² These latter two 'realities' also become subjects of the sentence.

Al-Nābulusī elaborates his concept of 'witnessing':

And so it [the act of witnessing] is an action (*fi'l*) in God, but in the angels and the possessor of knowledge it is a delegation of authority (*tafwīḍ*). It is through *tafwīḍ* that witnessing occurs. However, God only attributes the witnessing of Him to you if you delegate authority to Him. If you do this, then He annihilates you from your essence.³³

²⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

³⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

³¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

³² The word '*tanazzalat*' is associated through its constituent root letters with the Qur'ānic concepts of Divine Revelation - *inzāl* and *tanzīl*.

³³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

He is stating that witnessing is an action (*fiʿl*) in God. Thus, when it is predicated of God it is an action that He, as its agent (*fāʿil*), performs.³⁴ On the other hand, it is a *tafwīḍ* when predicated of the angels and possessors of knowledge.³⁵

Witnessing is only predicated of these two groups when there is *tafwīḍ* to God on their part.

Al-Nābulusī adds a degree of sophistication to the statement that God only attributes the witnessing of Him to someone if that person delegates authority to Him. The witnessing is not an action on the part of the angels or persons involved, rather it is a *tafwīḍ* from the subsequent subjects to the principal agent. The action remains God's. In other words, if someone were to delegate authority to God, then God would annihilate them from their essence or self (*ʿayn*).³⁶ Consequently, God is the

³⁴ Leaman, O, *Averroes and his Philosophy* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998), pp.46-52, surveys the different views of various theologians and philosophers on the issue of whether God is really an agent (*fāʿil*). He looks at Ghazali, Avicenna, Averroes, the Ashʿarites. There is a hint of this history in al-Nābulusī's choice of words here.

³⁵ Gilliot, Claude, *Exégèse, Langue et Théologie en Islam - L'Exégèse Coranique de Tabari* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J Vrin, 1990), p.266. Gilliot explains that in traditional Kalām, *tafwīḍ* was a belief held by the Qadarites, the proponents of free will. They understood it to mean that God left the acts of man to his entire discretion. It is apparent that al-Nābulusī's position in his introduction with regard to this term is quite different. He is using the term to signify man's delegating authority for his acts to God. The entry on *al-tafwīḍ* in Department of Theology, *A Commentary of Theology Expression* (Mashhad: Islamic Research Foundation, 1995), p.74, suggests that there is the possibility of going to extremes in delegating authority (*tafwīḍ*) to God to the extent that the servant is in the position of something lifeless, possessing no will and no choice. This seems pertinent here. Qurʾān 40:44 seems to support a similar use of this term: 'And I delegate authority for my affair to God' This is in a context where someone who believes in God is attempting to convince his people to believe in God too. He pleads the case that he delegates authority for his own affairs to God because God watches over His servants.

³⁶ See the chapter on Ibrāhīm for a full discussion of this concept of 'annihilation.' Izutsu, T, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things - Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy* (Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1994), pp.11-17, discusses the mystical-philosophical concepts of annihilation (*fanā*) and survival (*baqā*). It should be noted that his description of the concept of annihilation is similar in broad outline to what al-Nābulusī is elaborating here. Al-Nābulusī is using the term *maḥq* for annihilation rather than *fanā*. This is not an odd term to be used here for Ibn ʿArabī himself used

agent who actually witnesses and is also the object that is witnessed. The person who has delegated authority to God is not an agent of the action of witnessing. Al-Nābulusī adds that, while in this state of consciousness, some gnostics say, 'Only God knows God.'³⁷

Al-Nābulusī is suggesting that the people of witnessing (*ahl al-shuhūd*) enter a mystical state in which they delegate authority to God and, in some way, participate in God's witnessing of Himself.³⁸ They are able to know God as God knows Himself. It is only through transcending the blind following of their beliefs and through transcending the intellectual understanding of them that they reach this apparently ultimate state of knowledge and faith. Their essence or self is annihilated so that they participate, in some manner, with an action predicated of God.³⁹

this term to indicate *fanā'* (See al-Hakīm, S, *al-Mu'jam al-Ṣūfī - al-Ḥikma fī Ḥudūd al-Kalima* (Beirut: Dendera, 1981), p.1015). The annihilation of the ego-consciousness is the means through which to witness Reality in its absolute indetermination. In achieving this, man himself is not the subject of the act of witnessing, rather it is Reality. The epistemological subject with which to see things is gone and thus there are no objects to be seen. Multiplicity disappears. The concept of survival (*baqā'*) is a state where one sees oneself and all other things as determinations of one single reality. The multiplicity reappears, but the ego-consciousness is aware of the fundamental unity of Reality.

³⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3. Towards the end of his commentary, al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 312 & 314, states that God is both the one who knows (*ʿālim*) and what is known (*maʿlūm*). He adds that God is also the knowledge of the one who knows (*ʿilm al-ʿālim*), as well as being the one who witnesses (*al-shāhid*) and what is witnessed (*al-mashhūd*). This corroborates al-Nābulusī's statements to this end in the introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

³⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 42, uses the term '*ahl al-nihāya*' - adepts - to refer to those who are characterised by divine self-manifestation and veiling, and survival and annihilation. This is in contrast to the '*ahl al-bidāya*' - novices. At both a semantic and conceptual level, the *ahl al-shuhūd* and *ahl al-nihāya* refer to the same category of people.

³⁹ Izutsu, *Creation*, p.7, states in the context of a discussion of 'Iranian philosophy's inclination for mysticism' that whatever the object of knowledge, the highest degree of knowledge is always achieved when the knower, the human subject, becomes completely unified and identified with the object so much so that there remains no differentiation between the two. Thus differentiation means distance which, in cognitive relationships, signifies ignorance. It may follow that al-Nābulusī is ultimately suggesting the identity of God and man, however the strict logic of the language he uses does not necessarily lead to this conclusion. Throughout this thesis it will be shown that al-Nābulusī is

Qur'ān 3:18 is support for al-Nābulusī's contention that a certain type of people actually witnesses what it believes, while having heart-felt trust in that object of belief. These people witness what they believe through their delegation of authority to God.

At this point, al-Nābulusī states that the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* concerns the faith of this latter type of people only:

This great book which is the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is, however, about the faith of the people of witnessing only Only those whose spiritual power (*himma*) has risen from the depths of doctrine and intellectual understanding and whose veil of imagination (*wahm*) has been rent ... [will be close to] the understanding of the realities and witnessing of the intricacies.⁴⁰

The One God and His Different Manifestations⁴¹

Although the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is said to concern only the faith of those people who witness God through the delegation of authority to Him, al-Nābulusī has discussed two other types of faith. These descriptions constitute a hierarchy of faith and knowledge. At the top of this hierarchy are those who witness God, in the middle are those who attempt to understand God intellectually, and at the bottom are those who simply reiterate the Qur'ānic and Prophetic descriptions of God without any understanding of what they mean. Al-Nābulusī adduces a Qur'ānic verse to support his hierarchy of faith and of knowledge:

And We have raised some of them over others in ranks [Qur'ān 43:32].⁴²

frequently at pains to establish the utter difference between the transcendent God and originated creation.

⁴⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

⁴¹ The chapters on Ibrāhīm, Zakariyyā and Hārūn in this thesis cover the issue of the one God appearing in a multitude of different manifestations or forms. These chapters approach this fundamental issue from different, yet related, angles.

Al-Nābulusī argues above that there is only one act of witnessing which is an action belonging to God and performed by Him, yet it is also revealed to angels and to those who have knowledge if they delegate authority to God. He also states:

And there is no doubt that the three divisions of faith stem from a single division, which is what has come from God.⁴³

The object of faith is defined by al-Nābulusī as being God, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgement and the Laws and Judgements.⁴⁴ Although there are different categories of faith which are determined by the epistemological category of their adherents, the object of faith remains one. This is an assertion of a form of *tawḥīd*. Al-Nābulusī is emphasising the fact that God is one and that the object of belief is one. He is maintaining the monotheism of Islam, but in a sophisticated manner.

Al-Nābulusī argues that God is one, yet is experienced in different ways by different people:

God, in whom one must have faith, is one. However, He [God] differs according to His appearances. Thus, His appearance in the people of doctrines is different to His appearance in the people of discursive reasoning. Equally, His appearance is also different in the people of the witnessing of states (*aḥwāl*).⁴⁵

⁴² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁴³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

⁴⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

⁴⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3. This is probably a reference to the Sufi concept of states (*aḥwāl*) which are associated with stations (*maqāmāt*) on the path to God. Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, p.181 says: that “Station” (*maqām*) denotes anyone’s “standing” in the Way of God, and his fulfilment of the obligations appertaining to that “station” and his keeping it until he comprehends its perfection so far as lies in a man’s power. ... “State” (*ḥāl*), on the other hand, is something that descends from God into a man’s heart, without his being able to repel it when it comes, or to attract it when it goes, by his own effort. ... “Station” belongs to the category of acts, “state” to the category of gifts.’

A little later, while using the metaphor of fire for God, al-Nābulusī states:

And it [fire] is one and is not repeated, however it has appeared in every place in accordance with that place's predisposition.⁴⁶

Al-Nābulusī is arguing that while God is one, it is the predisposition of the place where He appears, or locus of manifestation, that determines how He is received. Thus, if the locus of manifestation is a blind imitator then God will be believed in but neither understood nor witnessed. On the other hand, if the locus is someone who examines what they believe, then God is believed in and understood, but not witnessed. Finally, if the locus is someone who witnesses God, then God is believed in, understood and then witnessed.

God's manifestation in the locus of the blind imitator is in accordance with this person's predisposition. This predisposition is doctrine (*al-qawl*) and so on. The aspect of doctrine predisposes the blind imitator to experience God in certain ways and to depend on others, who are like him, to acquire and talk about this experience:

The one who talks relies on someone else when he talks, narrating on his authority. ... The teacher of the first [division of people who are the blind imitators] is another like him.⁴⁷

God's manifestation in the locus of someone who uses discursive reasoning is in accordance with this person's particular predisposition. This predisposition is intellectual understanding (*al-fahm*) and so on. The aspect of understanding predisposes the one who uses discursive reasoning to experience God in certain ways and to depend on his intellect and mind to acquire and talk about this experience:

⁴⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁴⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

He who conceptualises (*al-mutaṣawwir*) relies on his mind when conceptualising, narrating on its authority. ... The teacher of the second [division of people who reason discursively] is his intellect and mind.⁴⁸

Before progressing to al-Nābulusī's presentation of the minutiae of the higher category of faith through witnessing only after doctrine and intellectual understanding, it is important to stress a point about the first two categories of people. In both these categories there is a dependence on something other than the self in order to have a degree of knowledge about the object of belief. This 'something other' is either another person similar to the self or is the mind or intellect upon which the self depends. Thus, the manifestation of God in both these epistemological categories is 'intended through what is other than it':

The first two appearances ... are intended through the other.⁴⁹

The ramification of this medium of otherness is differentiation. This differentiation necessitates degrees of ignorance of the object known. The object cannot be fully known unless the cognitive distance between the subject and object is completely effaced.⁵⁰ Al-Nābulusī argues that this occurs only in the faith of those whose epistemological category is that of witnessing only after language and understanding.

Al-Nābulusī's theory of the effacement of the self through *tafwīd* leads to God's act of knowing Himself through the medium of that effaced self.⁵¹ This seems

⁴⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

⁴⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁵⁰ See the earlier footnote about Izutsu, *Creation*, p.7, where there is an explanation for the theory that the highest knowledge of a given object is where there is no differentiation between the knowing subject and the object known.

⁵¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

to be a reformulation of traditional Sufi theories concerning *fanā'* and *baqā'*.⁵² The act of *tafwīd* is equivalent to the act of *fanā'*, where man's ego-consciousness is annihilated and he is thus able to witness God in His utter oneness, or rather God witnesses Himself through man. The state of *baqā'* follows that of *fanā'* and is where man sees both himself and all other things as entities in the utter oneness of God. For al-Nābulusī, this theory is relevant to the people of the higher category of faith which is through witnessing only after speech and understanding, since God has annihilated them from their essence or self. This is the experience of *fanā'* and *baqā'*:

Gnostics witness it [the pristine single division of faith coming from God] through their secrets. ... The one who witnesses relies in his witnessing on the reality of what he witnesses, narrating on its authority. ... The teacher of the third [division of people who witness] is his Lord.⁵³

Al-Nābulusī adduces a Sufi adage to emphasise the value judgement implicit in his hierarchical categorisation of the different types of faith. This adage highlights the supremacy of the faith of witnessing over the other types of faith. It also stresses the source of knowledge for those of superior faith. This source is the living God and not dead people, whether thinkers or blind imitators. Furthermore, the knowledge derived from the faith of witnessing is living and not dead:

You have taken your knowledge as one dead person from another whereas we have taken our knowledge from the one who lives and never dies.⁵⁴

God's manifestation in the locus of the one who has mystical knowledge is said to be the most complete of the three manifestations:

⁵² See Rahman, F, 'Bakā' wa-Fanā'', in *EL*² (Leiden: Brill, 1960), I, 951. See the chapter on Ibrāhīm, where al-Nābulusī deals with this theory of *fanā'* and *baqā'* thoroughly.

⁵³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

There is nothing more complete than the appearance connected with witnessing because it is what is intended It is intended through itself.⁵⁵

This reinforces the sense that al-Nābulusī is reformulating aspects of traditional Sufi cognitive theory. There is no cognitive distance between the subject and object. It is through the effacement or annihilation of the ego-consciousness that adept Sufis arrive at some form of complete experience of God.⁵⁶ The implication of the annihilation of the ego-consciousness is that the Sufi merges into some form of consciousness which is actually God's. Through this experience of God as He intended Himself to appear and how He knows Himself, the Sufi has a complete knowledge of God.⁵⁷ This is an explanation of the Sufi experience of witnessing God according to al-Nābulusī.

Al-Nābulusī has systematically described and explained his understanding of mankind according to categories of faith and epistemology. This is a sophisticated and intellectualised approach to the experience of God. The broad structures of earlier Sufi descriptions of the mystical experience of God appear to be present in al-Nābulusī's thought. However, whereas the mystical experiences of the pre-Ibn 'Arabī era seem much more overtly religious, ritualised and lacking formulation, al-Nābulusī, like Ibn 'Arabī, describes his experiences and those of others in a much more

⁵⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 3.

⁵⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁵⁶ See the chapter on Ibrāhīm for a thorough discussion of this.

⁵⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 312, states that God is the one who knows (*al-ʿālim*) and what is known (*al-maʿlūm*), and also the knowledge of the one who knows (*ʿilm al-ʿālim*). Furthermore, he adds that God is also the one who witnesses (*al-shāhid*) and what is witnessed (*al-mashhūd*). It would follow that He is also the witnessing of the one who witnesses (*shahādat al-shāhid*). See earlier in this

intellectualised formulation. In this respect he is very much in the school of Ibn ʿArabī who represents a great watershed in the systematisation and intellectualisation of Sufism. Annemarie Schimmel writes about Ibn ʿArabī:

Even though Ibn ʿArabī may have claimed not to have created any system, his sharp and cool intellect certainly brought him to systematise his experiences and thoughts, and the influence of his terminology upon later Sufis seems to show that they accepted his thoughts as a handy systematisation of what formed, in their view, the true essence of Sufism.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the aspect of religious and mystical experience is present in al-Nābulusī's writings, as much as it is present in Ibn ʿArabī's, and this must be borne in mind while appreciating the heavily intellectualised formulations of his thought.

Polemical Disputes over the Understanding of the One God

Having described and explained the existence of a hierarchy of people determined by faith and knowledge, al-Nābulusī presents a theory of how these people argue over the validity of their beliefs. It is God's different appearances to different classes of people that engenders the polemical disputes over the identity and role of God.

Al-Nābulusī emphasises the existence of his hierarchical classification of mankind:

It is known that there is nothing more complete than the appearance of God who is connected to witnessing; beneath this is the appearance [of God] connected to discursive reasoning and intellection; and beneath this is the appearance [of God] related to doctrine and blind imitation.⁵⁹

chapter where al-Nābulusī interprets Qur'ān 3:18 and where he states that 'some gnostics have said that only God knows God.'

⁵⁸ Schimmel, A, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p.273

⁵⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

This hierarchy can be appreciated as an inverted pyramid. At the top, which is the widest and most complete location, is the appearance of God to the people of witnessing. The next rank down is less wide and less complete. This belongs to the people of intellect and reasoning. Finally, at the bottom is the narrowest and least complete location, where the people of doctrine and blind imitation are placed.

Although the knowledge of God becomes progressively less complete as one descends from top to bottom, it is no less valid.⁶⁰ The issue for al-Nābulusī is that the less knowledge of God someone has, the less able they would be to appreciate the more complete knowledge of God belonging to someone of a higher rank of faith. This lack of appreciation or ignorance of what belongs to higher ranks of faith and knowledge is pivotal. It also leads to the issue of religious authority which is implicit in al-Nābulusī's arguments here.⁶¹ This hierarchy explains the existence of polemical debates over the truth claims of Sufis and non-Sufis. Al-Nābulusī says:

Likewise the reality of the belief in God has an appearance in the doctrine of the blind imitators which is different to its appearance in the conceptualisation of those who use discursive reasoning. [This latter appearance is in turn] different to its appearance in the witnessing of the gnostics who realise [God]. Thus, the phrases vary and the allusions are diverse. Each group talks with what they possess. Everyone is right. They all have ranks in the eyes of their Lord.⁶²

Al-Nābulusī explains that because God appears differently to each category, the people of each category talk about the one God with different expressions.

⁶⁰ Of course, to be more precise one should state that it is knowledge of God, His Books, Messengers, the Day of Judgement and of His Laws and Judgements that is perceived differently by the members of this epistemological hierarchy (al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 3). It is these objects of knowledge that are spoken of, understood and experienced.

⁶¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301, explains that Sufis who are graced with the faculties of unveiling and insight have no doubts about any issue at all. They are limited in what they can say by the time and place in which they live. They are also limited by the language of the people among whom they live. Thus, they are only limited by their sound unveiling (*kashf*) and mystical insight (*dhawq*) when they address others like themselves.

Despite these differences they are all correct in their descriptions, however limited they might be due to their position in the hierarchical structure of faith and knowledge.

Al-Nābulusī states that the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* concerns the appearance of God to the people of witnessing.⁶³ The expressions used in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* to describe this manifestation of God may be difficult for those people of the other lower categories.⁶⁴ Furthermore, these lower people are said to be ignorant *perforce* of this manifestation of God. They will reject what they understand of this manifestation according to their own knowledge of God, whether that be through doctrine or conceptualisation.⁶⁵

Al-Nābulusī states that if the people of a certain category were to abandon their faith in and knowledge of God that would be an act of unbelief toward God (*kufr*):

And so if they were to leave it [the state], they would leave the extent of what they know of God. This is unbelief.⁶⁶

There is hope for people of lower categories of faith and knowledge to appreciate God's appearance to those who are of higher categories. This appreciation is not something for which they themselves can actively strive. On the contrary, it is God alone who can impart this appreciation to them.⁶⁷ Other than through the intervention of God, the position of a certain person in the hierarchy of faith and

⁶² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁶³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁶⁴ Note that al-Nābulusī has stated that the people of witnessing are those who have mystical insight (*dhawq*) which is a factor differentiating them from others and enabling them to experience God as He knows Himself.

⁶⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁶⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

knowledge is fixed. Furthermore, this strengthens the implicit authority possessed by those persons who are in the highest rank. Not only do they have the broadest and most profound knowledge of and faith in God, His books and so on, they are also said to have received this from God Himself.

On the other hand, if people do want to understand what is above their own state or category without any inspired understanding from God, then they would lower the higher category to that of their own. Rather than elevating themselves to a more complete belief in and knowledge of God, they would constrict this to their own narrow view of God. The higher category would frustrate or invalidate their own lower category in which they worship God. The expressions, allusions, and knowledge of the higher category would be incompatible with those of the lower. The differences between the two categories would lead to confusion. The people of the lower category would only be able to reject the higher category since it would have come to them as filtered through their own level of understanding and not as understood by the people of the higher category.⁶⁸

Al-Nābulusī uses two examples to explain this theory. They both make the same point. He presents a situation in which someone, whose belief in and knowledge of God are through intellectual understanding and doctrine only, talks about his conceptualisations of God to someone else, whose belief in and knowledge of God are through doctrine only. The second situation is one in which one of the people of witnessing talks about his insights into God in the presence of the people of the two lower categories. This is al-Nābulusī's second example:

⁶⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁶⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

If the person who witnesses, talks about God, whom he finds in his insight, in the presence of the blind imitator and the one who uses discursive reasoning, then these latter two would find that he has something of God that they themselves do not have. And so, if the perfection of his state appears to them out of obedience, submission and success from God, then they demand his state and strive to reach it. However, if that does not appear to them, they maintain the extent of God that they know, avoid him out of praise or censure, and are occupied with themselves. [This is the case only] if they have some divine success [that is to say if God grants them some success]. If God forsakes them, they lower his state to the doctrine and discursive reasoning in which they are found. Thus, his state appears in the doctrine of the blind imitator as unbelief and as deviation and error in the mind of the one who uses discursive reasoning. They both rebuke him for his state, but they do not know that what they have understood of his state and for which they have censured him is what he censures too and is that of which he declares himself innocent. However, they do not understand his state according to what it is as he himself knows it.⁶⁹

God alone is able to impart the understanding of higher categories of faith to those of lower ones.⁷⁰ Al-Nābulusī re-emphasises this in the above quotation. It is only through the success granted by God (*tawfīq*) that the perfection of the highest category, which is that of the Sufi, appears to those of the lower categories. Thus, God is the ultimate actor in deciding who will know Him completely, partially or not at all.

Among the two lower categories of faith in and knowledge about God there are three possible reactions to the Sufi's insights into God. These reactions are determined and decreed by God. The first reaction is that the person of the lower category, on receiving *tawfīq* from God, seeks and strives to reach the highest category of faith in and knowledge of God. Those who receive only some *tawfīq* keep their own category of faith and knowledge and avoid the person of the highest category. Finally, those who are forsaken by God, lower the highest category to their own baser category. The highest category appears to the forsaken of the lowest category, which is that of blind imitation, as an act of unbelief. To the forsaken of the

⁶⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4-5.

middle category, which is that of discursive reasoning, it appears as deviation and error. This leads both types of forsaken person to reject what they consider to be the Sufi's category - that of mystical insight and witnessing.

Al-Nābulusī is suggesting that this third type of reaction to the highest category of faith in and knowledge of God has led to the history of polemics between certain Sufis and those who do not share their vision of God and the world. This is the main reason for his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. He wants to put an end to this type of reaction whose deleterious effects for true Sufis he wished to counteract. His explanation of the criticism of the true Sufis suggests that these critics are God-forsaken and have no divine *tawfīq* at all. These forsaken critics criticise what they consider to be the beliefs of the Sufis; however, al-Nābulusī suggests that what they criticise is their own debasement of those beliefs, not the beliefs themselves. The critics are merely engaging in self-criticism.

The implicit authority associated with the highest category of faith in and knowledge of God may suggest that, for al-Nābulusī, the criticisms levelled against these true Sufis are not only a rejection of Sufis but also of God's own authority. This would make critics of true Sufis unbelievers and ungrateful towards God.

The *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and its intended Readership

Al-Nābulusī states:

This book which is the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is about the explanation of the manifestation [of God] connected with witnessing.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

⁷¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 4.

The *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* was intended for a specialised audience. Al-Nābulusī believed this audience was meant to be accomplished great Sufi masters who possessed the right category of faith and knowledge with which to interpret the difficult expressions in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

The *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* has been read by Sufi novices and opponents of this form of Sufism as well as by the intended great Sufis. These Sufi novices and opponents, lacking *dhawq*, might have misunderstood the contents of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* as well as its commentaries. At worst, they might have come to view it as *kufṛ* or deviation and error. In fact, the logic of al-Nābulusī's arguments suggests that unless God had imparted *tawfīq* to a novice or opponent they would certainly have misunderstood the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

Believing himself to possess *dhawq*, al-Nābulusī considers it important and necessary to provide a commentary that will help those who are less privileged to come to the 'correct' understanding of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. His *dhawq* enables him to speak with authority on the subject unlike all those who lack *dhawq*. This authority puts him in a position to state that the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is an orthodox book. Since these critics must await divine inspiration in order to understand the book correctly, they must in the interim put trust in al-Nābulusī's authority as its interpreter.

Al-Nābulusī as Interpreter

Al-Nābulusī presents himself as an interpreter (*tarjumān*) between those who have *dhawq*, and who understand the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* ‘correctly’, and those who are either Sufi novices or are incompetent and see error in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. Al-Nābulusī hopes to overcome the tension and misunderstanding between the God-forsaken (*khadhalahum Allāh*), who see the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and all other works of those who have the most complete faith in and knowledge of God as either *kufr* or deviation and error and those who belong to this highest form of faith:

So the matter was in need of an interpreter knowing both languages and informed of the intentions of both groups I hope with the assistance of God to be that interpreter of this book which is the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* [and to be this] with providence and success from the much-forgiving Lord.⁷²

Al-Nābulusī argues that such an interpreter would be able to speak on behalf of one group against another and vice versa.⁷³ In the same manner that he argued that the same object of worship is perceived differently by the different types of faith and knowledge, al-Nābulusī argues that what the exoteric scholars deny of the esotericists is what the latter themselves would deny.⁷⁴ For al-Nābulusī, there is a misunderstanding of an object of belief among these different types of people, and not a fundamental difference of belief.⁷⁵ On the other hand:

⁷² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 5.

⁷³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 5.

⁷⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 5.

⁷⁵ Al-Nābulusī does state that the object of belief is composite. It is in God, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgement and in His Laws and Judgements.

If that which the esoteric scholars acknowledge and of which the exoteric scholars are ignorant were to appear as it is to the exoteric scholars they would believe in it and submit to it without any doubt or hesitation.⁷⁶

However, this reasoning leaves the person without *dhawq* having to place their trust in the authority and knowledge of the esoteric true Sufi. It is this trust in his own authority that al-Nābulusī is asking of those he is addressing.

Al-Nābulusī is suggesting in his introduction to his commentary that none of the previous commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* are of use in explaining it ‘correctly’ to its opponents and to Sufi novices. This implies that the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* can be explained to these people and that they might be willing to have it explained to them in a way to which their incipient beliefs or confirmed prejudices are not accustomed.

Furthermore, there is the fact that al-Nābulusī has stated a number of times that one reaches the stage of faith in and knowledge of God, not through oneself, but through *tafwīḍ* in God. It is God who knows God, and not the Sufi master. The Sufi master is but a vehicle in which God comes to know Himself. This gift of knowing God as God knows Himself comes from God, not from man.⁷⁷ The question begs to be asked as to what extent al-Nābulusī could reconcile his act of composing a commentary to lead the incompetent and the novices to an understanding of the beliefs

⁷⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 5.

⁷⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 312 & 314, states that God is the one who knows and what is known. He adds that God’s ‘being known’ (*ma‘lūmuh*) is from God as the spirit (*rūḥ*) which He breathes into man. See Qur’ān 38:72 and 15:29.

of the people of witnessing with the fact that it is God who bestows the *tawfīq* necessary for striving for or tolerating the perfection of the Sufi's witnessing of God.

This issue does not seem apparent to al-Nābulusī. He seems confident that he can compose a cogent exegesis of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. His writings suggest that he saw himself as the mediator through whom the meanings of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* may pass from the recondite original text into the language of one of the types of people who have difficulties in understanding it correctly. This may well be in a diluted form, but it would be a 'correct' form.

That he believes his knowledge of God is given to him by God implies that al-Nābulusī thinks he has a divinely-invested authority to talk about God and to explain the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. Furthermore, the belief that his knowledge of God comes from God means that no opposition to his views can be brooked. Criticism of al-Nābulusī could mean criticism of God.

As is to be expected, he does state that he puts his reliance upon God for inspiration in understanding the text and in interpreting it. At the end of his commentary he states boldly that he was not the author of the commentary, rather God confided it to him.⁷⁸ He also emphasises the fact that he made use of divine inspiration only, and not of any of the earlier commentaries. His trust was placed in the help and favour of God.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 343.

⁷⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 344.

Al-Nābulusī has implied in the introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* that his experience of the objects of his faith and knowledge is such that he can speak with complete authority concerning them. Those who lack the same experience are in no position to criticise him, rather they should accept on trust his statements of explanation and hope to be inspired by God in a similar manner. It is implied that until that inspiration comes, one must not attempt to understand what cannot be understood by human faculties alone. Al-Nābulusī's arguments are strong if the Sufi world-view he delineates is accepted. If, on the other hand, this world-view is not accepted then his arguments appear weak and hollow.

CHAPTER 4

Ibrāhīm

Introduction

Al-Nābulusī's commentary on the chapter on Ibrāhīm constitutes an understanding of God's relationship with Himself and with man. Al-Nābulusī states that the chapter on Ibrāhīm is concerned with the wisdom of real sublimity (*al-^calū al-ḥaqīqī*).¹ This real sublimity refers to the idea that God in His Sublime Essence is utterly beyond the knowledge and experience of any created thing. Implicit in this is the contrast with metaphorical (*al-majāzī*) sublimity, which may be attributed to God as known by man.² Although the Divine Essence is not known, God is said to be known with respect to the fact that He possesses the worlds and is their God.³ This involves God in a relationship with His creation. Man does experience and does have

¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, 2 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1304-1323), I, 144.

² This is a constant theme appearing in many of al-Nābulusī's comments on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. For example, al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 6, states, 'Every legally responsible person is commanded to affirm the transcendent god, who is in [people's] beliefs, but He [the transcendent god] is not the True God with whom rational judgement is not connected, neither by affirmation nor negation.' Furthermore, al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 340, states, 'If He [God] wishes, He is transcendent in his belief with respect to the lack of specification of form in His self which that servant knows. This is rational metaphorical transcendence, not real transcendence in which God is in His self.' Similar statements establishing the contrast between the known, manifest, metaphorical God and the unknown, transcendent, real God can be found frequently, such as: al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 320, 337, 339 & 341.

³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 144, states this directly when explaining the 'wisdom' associated with Ibrāhīm. Ibrāhīm is said to have come to experience and know God holding him and penetrating every part of him. This is attributed to God's possession of the corporeal and spiritual world. However, al-Nābulusī emphasises the point that God in His Sublime Self is neither experienced nor known by Ibrāhīm or anyone else.

knowledge of God but not of what God is in His Sublime Self (*naḥsuh al-ʿaliyya*).⁴

This experience and knowledge is in a hierarchy of graded degrees.⁵ Al-Nābulusī

characterises the relationship between God and man, indeed all creation, by the reciprocity of nourishment, which signifies that they need each other. God needs man in order to be known by something other than Himself whereas man needs God in order to exist.⁶

Ibn ʿArabī and Ibrāhīm

Qurʾānic Motifs

Ibn ʿArabī employs two principal Qurʾānic motifs in his discussion of Ibrāhīm:

Ibrāhīm as friend of God and Ibrāhīm as offering hospitality and food to others.⁷

Three subjects may serve as a framework for understanding Ibn ʿArabī's exposition of

⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 144. He states on page 145 that if someone perceives their Creator possessing him, then this is only in accordance with the Creator's appearance to him, and not in accordance with what He is in His Self.

⁵ See the chapter on al-Nābulusī's introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* where he presents his views on such a hierarchy in detail. In summary, this hierarchy is threefold and determined by the measure of an individual's knowledge and faith: the people of blind imitation whose faith is through doctrine/speech, the people of discursive reasoning whose faith is through understanding with doctrine/speech, and the people of witnessing whose faith is after understanding and speech. The first category are the majority of people, the second category are a minority of thinkers, theologians and philosophers, whereas the third category are another minority who are Sufis gifted with gnosis and experience of God.

⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 21, 'God wanted to see His Essence particularised in the archetypes of His attributes called the Realities of His Names in all His 'Planes of Being' ... [because] seeing the self appearing in the form of the other is not like seeing the self without that other.' Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 36, 'If it were not for the Lord, the servant would not exist. If it were not for the servant, the Lord would not be described by attributes. Existence is from the Lord. Attributes are from the servant.'

⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. by AA ʿAfīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1980), I, 80 & 84. These can be found in Qurʾān 4:125, 11:69, and 51:24-30.

Ibrāhīm: Ibrāhīm's *ḥikma* in the title of the chapter; the *takhallul* of God and man; the ethical dimension and God's freedom and efficacy with respect to that.⁸

The *Ḥikma*

Ibn ʿArabī's title of the chapter on Ibrāhīm is:

The Wisdom of Rapturous Love (*al-muḥayyamiyya*) in Ibrāhīm's Word.⁹

Ibn ʿArabī does not use the word for rapturous love again in this chapter. He immediately begins his discussion of Ibrāhīm who is referred to as the friend of God (*al-khalīl*). However, this ensuing discussion does raise the issue of Ibrāhīm's relationship with the Divine Essence, where both are hidden and veiled by the other. From one perspective, Ibrāhīm is lost in the Divine Essence's attributes, while from another perspective the Divine Essence is lost in Ibrāhīm's attributes. The rapturous love of the title may refer to this relationship.

Takhallul

Ibrāhīm as friend of God (*al-khalīl*) is said to pervade (*yatakhallal*) the Divine Essence's attributes while the existence of his own form (*ṣūra*) is pervaded by God. This mutual pervasion is the central theme of Ibn ʿArabī's discussion of Ibrāhīm. Ibn ʿArabī amplifies this:

Do you not see God appearing in the attributes of originated things? ... Do you not see creation (*al-makhlūq*) appearing in all the attributes of God?¹⁰

⁸ Nettler, RL, 'The Figure and Truth of Abraham in Ibn ʿArabī's *Fusus al-Hikam*', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabī Society*, 24 (1998), 21-50 (p.23).

⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 80.

Ibn ʿArabī argues that whatever is pervading is veiled by whatever is being pervaded. That which is passive in this relationship is seen, while that which is active is unseen. The active is also said to be ‘food’ (*ghidhā*) for the passive.¹¹ Ibn ʿArabī returns to this imagery of food and nourishment at the end of chapter where he introduces the motif of Ibrāhīm establishing the tradition of hospitality to strangers:

Those who are nourished are fed with nourishment (*al-arzāq*). If nourishment pervades the essence of whoever is nourished so that it pervades every part of him, then the food penetrates all the parts of whoever is fed. But there are no parts; so it must pervade all the divine stations which are expressed as names: and so His essence appears in them.¹²

Ibn ʿArabī characterises the relationship between God and Ibrāhīm as one of mutual pervasion and feeding. There is a mutuality, intertwining and interdependence that is noteworthy. Ibn ʿArabī does reveal what God and Ibrāhīm depend on each other for:

If God is apparent, then creation is veiled in Him; and so, creation is all the names of God ..., all His relations (*nisab*) and perceptions. If creation is apparent, then God is veiled and hidden in it; and so, God is creation’s hearing, sight, hands, legs, and all its powers.... If the [Divine] Essence is stripped of these relations (*nisab*), it is not a god. These relations are originated by our archetypes (*ʿayān*): and so, we have made Him a god through our being subject to divinity; He is not known until we are known.¹³

And,

You are His food (*ghidhā’uh*) through determinations (*aḥkām*) and He is your food (*ghidhā’uk*) through existence.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 80.

¹¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 81.

¹² Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 84.

¹³ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 81.

¹⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 83. See below in the section concerning Ethics and God’s Freedom for an explanation of what is meant by determinations (*aḥkām*).

Ibn ʿArabī emphasises that creation is what it is; it cannot be changed and it determines the whole of God’s knowledge. God needs His creation in order to be known. Without creation, God has no divine names, attributes and so on. However, God imparts existence to His creation. Without that existence, creation would not be. They are constrained by each other and pervade each other. God’s existence pervades all creation, while God is known through His creation. If it were not for His creation, He would remain an unknown and unknowable essence. For this essence to be known as God, it needs an existent creation to be subject to and to know the divine in its manifold attributes and names.¹⁵

Ibn ʿArabī uses the ‘terminology of abstraction [which] posits a divine essence and divine attributes, the basic formulation and description of God’s nature found in various trends of Islamic thought.’¹⁶ His use of the Essence-attributes model applied to God is different to the conventional in the notion that a particular human being enters and fully possesses those attributes which characterise the Divine Essence.¹⁷ The interior of man being the venue of the human adoption of divine attributes is

¹⁵ There is no contradiction in the fact that God cannot be known in one aspect, yet can be known in another. God qua Essence is unknown and unknowable, but God qua God is known and knowable.

¹⁶ Nettler, ‘The Figure’, p.25. Ibn ʿArabī’s conception of God as Essence and attributes is different from that held by theologians and philosophers; Nettler argues, p.31, that for conventional thinkers the Divine Essence was in a sense the ‘true’ God, the attributes being there for God’s own reason with respect to His creation. Nettler suggests, p.32, that the concept of the ‘true God’ was formulaic and devoid of any significance for Ibn ʿArabī and thus does not figure significantly in his thought. For Ibn ʿArabī, the created world is the divine attributes and, thereby, is identified with God.

¹⁷ Nettler, ‘The Figure’, p.26. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 80.

exemplary of Ibn ʿArabī's general central idea of the true God as dwelling within His creation.¹⁸

Ethics and God's Freedom

The above discussion of Ibn ʿArabī's theme of *takhallul* does present some ethical issues which Ibn ʿArabī himself addresses in the chapter on Ibrāhīm. It has been mentioned that, for Ibn ʿArabī, creation 'is His [God's] food through determinations (*ahkām*) and He is your [creation's] food through existence.'¹⁹ This concept of determination (*ḥukm*) is important in Ibn ʿArabī's discussion of the relationship between God and man.²⁰

Ibn ʿArabī argues that the two insights that man can grasp concerning his relationship with God - that the world is only God's manifestation in the forms of the archetypes of creation and that creation's forms appear in God - together produce the realisation that:

We determine ourselves through ourselves but in Him.²¹

¹⁸ Nettler, 'The Figure', p.26. Even Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 226, qualifies this at the end of the chapter on Muḥammad where he says, 'the god of beliefs is taken by constraints and it is the God which is encompassed by the heart of His servant. However, the absolute God is not encompassed by anything' Al-Nābulusī holds a similar view, but elaborated in terms of existence and non-existence. For him, it is the metaphorical God, not the Real God, who is encompassed by His believing servant. Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 341, 'The god of beliefs ... is taken by constraints, that is to say determinations, forms and divine matters according to various intellects. He is the God which, as is related in the *ḥadīth qudsī*, is encompassed by His believing servant However, the True God who is absolute with real absoluteness is not encompassed by anything at all. All things in relation to Him are pure non-existence while He is Real True Existence.'

¹⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 83.

²⁰ Nettler, 'The Figure', pp.33-4, notes that the *ḥ-k-m* root ordinarily signifies determination or control, and remarks that Ibn ʿArabī's use of it is redolent of 'free-will' doctrines, i.e. we 'determine' our lives and bear responsibility for our actions. *Ḥukm* is also a key metaphysical concept, connoting the nexus of metaphysical efficacy between various planes of being.

²¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 83.

This evokes both ethical and metaphysical aspects. There is the aspect in which ‘we’ determine our lives and actions and are responsible for them. Furthermore, there is the aspect in which ‘we’ determine our metaphysical selves or archetypes. Ibn ‘Arabī is alluding to both aspects at one and the same time. He proceeds to discuss the nature of God’s knowledge and how creation determines or, rather, ‘affects’ this divine knowledge. This explains how, on the metaphysical plane, creation can determine itself through itself in God.

Ibrāhīm pervades all of God’s names and ‘feeds’ Him with his determinations (*alḥkām*). God pervades the existence of Ibrāhīm’s form and ‘feeds’ him with existence. Ibrāhīm enables God to be known while God brings Ibrāhīm into existence.

Nettler sums this up:

Abraham as God’s friend (*khalil Allah*) and Abraham as bestower of hospitality, particularly food, indicate the intermingled being of God and His creation (*takhallul*) and the thoroughgoing nature of this intermingling.²²

The Divine Essence

Al-Nābulusī acknowledges Ibn ‘Arabī’s title for the chapter on Ibrāhīm, but merely gives a semantic explanation of the terms used in it. He then provides an introductory preamble to the chapter on Ibrāhīm which includes an exegesis of the Qur’ānic story of Ibrāhīm asking God for a favour.²³ This precedes his actual commentary on the lines of Ibn ‘Arabī’s text. This preamble is his initial comment on

²² Nettler, ‘The Figure’, pp.49-50.

the *faṣṣ*. This Qur'ānic story is not mentioned by Ibn 'Arabī in this chapter. Al-Nābulusī is taking his own line on Ibrāhīm from the outset.

The favour that Ibrāhīm asks for is the knowledge of how God gives life to the dead. God simply asks Ibrāhīm whether he believes or not. Ibrāhīm replies that he does, but that his heart needs to be assured. God, seemingly content with this, tells Ibrāhīm what to do so that he might see how God gives life to the dead.²⁴

In his exegesis of this story, al-Nābulusī provides some clues to his understanding of the broad themes of the chapter as a whole:

Ibrāhīm began to find God ... pervading every part of him ... not in accordance with what He is in relation to His Sublime Self, for He [God] is in accordance with what He is in His eternity without beginning, while Ibrāhīm is an originated created thing. If the originated created thing perceives the eternally pre-existent creator possessing him, he does so only according to His [God's] appearance to him, and not according to what He is in Himself. If he [the created thing] is in rapturous love with Him [God], then this love is from the perspective of that special appearance and belief in the absolute unseen accompanies it in all states.²⁵

According to al-Nābulusī there are a number of distinctions between God and all things other than Him. On the one hand, God is said to be uncreated and in eternity without beginning, whereas Ibrāhīm, and by extension everything else other than God too, is created and with a beginning.²⁶ On the other hand, a distinction is established between God's appearance to Himself and His appearance to everything other than

²³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145. The Qur'ānic story is from Qur'ān 2:260.

²⁴ See Qur'ān 2:260.

²⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 144-5.

²⁶ This distinction between God and creation is consistently maintained. On p.158 al-Nābulusī states that there is only God and creation. God is said to be pure existence utterly transcendent from quantity, manner, time and space and so on, and even from what is understood by transcendent. In contrast, creation is said to be utterly non-existent determinations encompassing quantity, manner, time and space and so on. Later, on p.161, he states that the Truth (God) is truth according to what it

Himself. This creates a transcendent or remote God known only to Himself and an immanent or manifest God known to Himself and everything other than Him. Thus, if someone feels a rapturous love for God then that love is from the perspective of God's special appearance to that person.²⁷

This sets the scene for the exegesis and the various lessons that al-Nābulusī wishes to draw from it. Firstly, al-Nābulusī states:

He [Ibrāhīm] asked his Lord 'My Lord! Show me how you bring the dead to life' [Qur'ān 2:260] asking for gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of Him with respect to His possession (*istīlā'uh*) of His creation through acts (*bi 'l-af'āl*).²⁸

Earlier it was noted that Ibrāhīm perceived the creator possessing him in accordance with the creator's appearance to him. This perception is the gnosis for which Ibrāhīm is asking God. It is said that this possession of creation is through deeds. God is acting through deeds. Furthermore, it seems that Ibrāhīm is not able to reach gnostic knowledge of God alone, he petitions God for it. It is implied that the gnostic knowledge of God is a gift from God, if it comes at all, in response to that petition.

is while creation is creation according to what it is. He adds that perfection belongs to God while deficiency belongs to everything other than Him.

²⁷ Nettler, 'The Figure', p.24, notes that 'the adjective *muhayyamiyya* attached to *hikma* conveys a basic idea here round which Ibn 'Arabi by extensions builds his metaphysical explication of Abraham's essential truth: a rapturous, ecstatic, even reckless love through which one loses oneself in another. This loss of self (or transcendence of self) may also imply the effacing of the self's boundaries: loss of self in rapturous love of the other may then mean a final blending which renders the self inextricable from and part of the other.' This is partially true in the case of al-Nābulusī. See the section on Knowledge in this chapter where al-Nābulusī's understanding of the traditional Sufi paradigm of annihilation and survival or union and separation is imposed upon Ibn 'Arabi's original ideas. Al-Nābulusī discusses the mystic's loss of self in his union with God and then the mystic's awareness of that union while also aware of his separation from God. This concurs with the thrust of Nettler's understanding of '*muhayyamiyya*'.

²⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

Secondly, al-Nābulusī elaborates his understanding of God's response which is an enquiry after Ibrāhīm's faith:

God replied to him, 'Do you not believe?' [Qur'ān 2:260]. That is to say: [Do you not believe] in the absolute unseen (*al-ghayb al-muṭlaq*) between you and which there is no connection for you to perceive it?²⁹

The absolute unseen is utterly beyond the apprehension of Ibrāhīm who is in rapturous love with God. Likewise, it is also beyond the apprehension of any other originated created thing. This absolute unseen is the remote or transcendent God. This belief in the absolute unseen accompanies the state of rapturous love with God. Ibrāhīm is in rapturous love with God from the perspective of God's special appearance to him. He must believe in the absolute unseen at the same time. The other thing that is unknown to him, and which appears to be the same as the absolute unseen, is what God is in Himself in eternity without beginning - that is the Divine Essence.

Thirdly, al-Nābulusī interprets Ibrāhīm's response to God's question about his faith:

He [Ibrāhīm] said, 'Yes [I do believe], but [I ask] in order to reassure my heart' [Qur'ān 2:260]. That is to say: [to reassure my heart] through witnessing that [divine miracle of bringing the dead back to life] according to what is appropriate for me, although it may not be according to what the matter really is.³⁰

²⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

³⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145. See Schimmel, A. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p.112, where she elucidates the role of the soul (*nafs*) in the Sufi Path. She recognises the Qur'ānic foundations for the Sufi emphasis on the struggle against the soul. These are Qur'ān 79:40, 12:53, 75:2, and 89:27. This latter verse, she argues, is the foundation for the belief that once purification of the soul has been achieved, the soul may become 'at peace' (*muṭma'inna*). Al-Nābulusī, in his exegesis of Ibrāhīm's petition of God, cites Qur'ān 2:260 to adduce Ibrāhīm's motivation. He wants his heart to be 'at peace' (*yaṭma'inn*). Al-Nābulusī does not confuse the heart and the soul in his commentary. Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 12, states that the heart (*al-*

Thus, Ibrāhīm is aware that he is asking to witness things which belong to the world of the absolute unseen - the world where God in Himself resides. This maintains the distinction between the uncreated, eternal world of God and the created originated world of man and all things other than God. Furthermore, al-Nābulusī has established that Ibrāhīm, as man of religion, is a mystical gnostic belonging to the category of witnessing (*al-shuhūd*) after intellectual understanding (*al-fahm*) and doctrine/speech (*al-qawl*) only.

The point that seems to emerge from this exegesis is the distinction between the unknown and known God. This is an important issue for al-Nābulusī.³¹ It enables him to establish the transcendence and difference of God from creation. The transcendent God is the Divine Essence, utterly unknown and unknowable. The Divine Essence as it appears to creation is the God of mankind. As al-Nābulusī said earlier:

If the originated created thing perceives the eternally pre-existent Creator possessing him, he does so only in accordance with His appearance to him, and not in accordance with what He is in Himself.³²

He also stated:

The Absolute Unseen between which and yourself there is no connection so that you might perceive it.³³

qalb) is living while the soul (*al-nafs*) is dead. It is of note here that in a description of a path to an awareness of God, al-Nābulusī cites a Qur'ānic verse which uses the term 'to be at peace' (*vaṭna'inn*) in association with the concept of the heart, which term is also found in association with the soul in the context of the Sufi Path.

³¹ It is dealt with in other chapters, including that on Muḥammad.

³² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

³³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

This is an important distinction which Ibn ʿArabī also highlights in the *faṣṣ* on Ibrāhīm. The absolute transcendent God is practically an insignificant concept for Ibn ʿArabī. The God that matters is the God who is known through His attributes and names. Al-Nābulusī adopts a different line on this issue. The absolutely transcendent God, that is the Divine Essence, may be unknown and unknowable to creation, however, it is still a significant concept. It is the Divine Essence that bestows existence.³⁴ Al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn ʿArabī that the God which is known is the God of the attributes and names.

However, unlike Ibn ʿArabī, al-Nābulusī places equal emphasis on the concept of the unknown God. He is also novel in the terminology that he uses. His use of the terms '*ijmāl*' and '*tafṣīl*' marks a striking difference from Ibn ʿArabī. The God which is not apprehended by created originated things is referred to as God's summation (*ijmāl/mujmal*).³⁵ In effect, this is the oneness of the ineffable true God. By contrast, the God that is known is the revealed God of multiplicity. That is to say, the known God is the God who is in accordance with His appearance to every thing. Everything comprises the world of multiplicity. If God's appearances to these things differ, then the known God must be the God of multiplicity. Al-Nābulusī continues:

³⁴ See later in this chapter for a discussion of the Essence's role as bestower of existence. See also the chapter on Zakariyyā.

³⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 149. This concept is referred to henceforth as either *ijmāl* or *mujmal*. See the chapter on Muḥammad for a discussion of this concept and the related term *tafṣīl*. In brief, al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 21, discusses the motivation for God's creation of the world. The totality of spiritual and corporeal existence is said to come from God as a differentiation (*tafṣīl*) from a summation (*ijmāl*) and returns to Him as summated (*mujmal*) from differentiation. God in Himself is

He [God] is not known except in differentiation (*tafṣīl*), not in *ijmāl*.³⁶

This *ijmāl* is related to the Divine Essence also:

The gnostic knowledge of God which everyone can have is the gnostic knowledge of an unseen essence [which is] *mujmala*.³⁷

This *ijmāl*, although known in its differentiation (*tafṣīl*), remains what it actually is in its own self. This is in harmony with al-Nābulusī's earlier statements about Ibrāhīm's, the originated created thing's, awareness of God.³⁸ Furthermore, al-Nābulusī states that God is in no need of the worlds:

With respect to the rank of His Sublime Essence, He is in no need of you and of anything else from the worlds. As He Himself said, 'And God is in no need of the worlds.'³⁹

By giving equal emphasis to this concept of the unknown God and by linking it to the Qur'ānic ideas of God's independence from creation, al-Nābulusī is appealing to Islamic Tradition to understand that his God is their God.⁴⁰ However, unlike Islamic Tradition, al-Nābulusī argues that it is creation that differentiates the *ijmāl* into the known god of differentiation:

We have differentiated His *ijmāl* among ourselves through our possibility, but He is in accordance with what He is among Himself and God is in no need of the worlds. If we are the ones who through our possibility have differentiated the *ijmāl* of His Essence and have distinguished between His

the oneness of summation, while creation is the multiplicity of differentiation. He argues that God wanted to see His summated Essence in the mirror of differentiation.

³⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 149.

³⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 150.

³⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

³⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 158. He cites Qur'ān 3:97. This is echoed on p.149.

⁴⁰ Gardet, L, 'Allah', in *ET*² (Leiden: Brill, 1960), I, 406-417 (409), where he states that 'the Qur'ānic preaching about God is entirely centred on its affirmations of Oneness and Unity, of transcendence and subsistence, of absolute perfections. The forbidding inaccessibility of the divine nature is resolutely maintained; God, omniscient and "near", can be known only by His Word, by the Names, the attributes and acts of His paramount Sovereignty, which He Himself reveals.'

Essence, attributes, names, deeds and *aḥkām* so that we have manifested through our non-existent possible realities and essences His divinity and lordship⁴¹

This passage demonstrates al-Nābulusī's understanding that it is creation, notably mankind, that makes God's divinity and lordship apparent. The implication is that if it were not for creation, God's divinity and lordship would not be apparent. Al-Nābulusī realises this and proposes, hypothetically, that if it were not for the non-existent possibles, which are creation, then God would remain a single *ijmāl*. He is again using striking terminology. Rather than state that it is creation that makes God a god, al-Nābulusī expands this and uses terms with philosophical and theological connotations:

If it were not for the non-existent possible things (*al-mumkināt al-ʿadamiyya*), He [God] would be a single *mujmal*. His attributes would be in His Essence, His names in His attributes, His deeds in His names, and His *aḥkām* in His deeds.⁴²

However, it is these non-existent possible things which differentiate the *ijmāl* and distinguish between His 'planes of Being' (*ḥaḍarāt*).⁴³ In the quotation above, al-Nābulusī is referring to creation or the 'we' by non-existent possible things. Furthermore, his reference to 'planes of Being' is a term for the attributes, names and so on, of God.

⁴¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 149.

⁴² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 149.

⁴³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 149. Izutsu, T., *Sufism and Taoism - A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (London: University of California Press, 1984), p.11, renders the term 'ḥaḍarāt' as 'planes' of Being in the context of a discussion of Ibn ʿArabī's ontological conceptions.

Al-Nābulusī continues to stress the pivotal role of creation in enabling God to be known, although he emphasises the fact that God in His oneness, or Divine Essence, is utterly unknown and unknowable:

It is impossible for anyone other than Him to know Him ... until we are known since we are the great origin in the differentiation (*tafṣīl*) of His *ijmāl*.⁴⁴

The point that al-Nābulusī is making is that God is God thanks to His creation, notably mankind. If it were not for this creation, God would merely be an Essence in a state of *ijmāl* known only to Himself. However, the logic of al-Nābulusī's argument is that since God is not merely an Essence in a state of oneness or *ijmāl* but is known, then creation must have differentiated Him or brought Him into the created world of multiplicity. This is a sophisticated elaboration of Ibn ʿArabī's argument that mankind made God a god through their being subject to Him as the divine:

So, we have made Him, through our state of being subject to the divine (*bi-ma'lūhiyyatinā*), a god. Thus He is not known until we are known.⁴⁵

It is important to elucidate and substantiate al-Nābulusī's understanding of Ibn ʿArabī's statement that mankind made God a god before addressing some of the related issues emerging from this theme of the unknown Divine Essence and the known God. He says:

And so we - because we are the same as those non-existent possible determined things - have made Him - with respect to His appearance to us - through our being subject to the divine - that is to say because of the fact that we are subject to Him as divine and that He is our god - a god. The god is the one who possesses all the needs of His servants with regard to existention and assistance.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 149.

⁴⁵ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 81.

⁴⁶ This anticipates the later discussion concerning Ibrāhīm being God's friend and God being Ibrāhīm's friend, as well as the theme of Ibrāhīm's bestowing hospitality and food on others. In

Divinity is the totality of attributes, names, deeds and determinations (*aḥkām*). It is an attributive adjective in relation to those subject to the divine; these are His servants and He is their god. He is not a god for Himself because His self is not subject to Him as divine. Through His self, He is in no need of the worlds, but not through His attributes, names, deeds or *aḥkām*, because if it were not for the worlds neither His attributes, names, deeds nor *aḥkām* would be distinguished from His Essence.⁴⁷

Firstly, it must be noted that al-Nābulusī refers again to mankind - the 'we' - as being non-existent and possible. 'We' are denoted by essences (*dhawāt*), realities (*ḥaqā'iq*), and determined things (*maqdūrāt*).⁴⁸ In contradistinction to this is the way in which God - or the Divine Essence - is referred to. The Divine Essence is necessary whereas everything other than It is possible. The Divine Essence is also existent in contradistinction to everything other than It which is non-existent.⁴⁹

effect, al-Nābulusī has described here the reciprocal relationship between God and creation. Creation enables God to be a god. God needs something other than Himself in order to be a God. Creation fulfils this need of His. On the other hand, creation needs existence among other things from something other than themselves in order to exist. God satisfies this need of theirs. There is established here a reciprocity of need between God and His creation.

⁴⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 148-9.

⁴⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 155, argues that every non-existent thing is revealed to God in his eternally pre-existent knowledge. On p.158, he states that creation is utterly non-existent determinations encompassing quantity, manner, time, space and so on. On p.161 al-Nābulusī comments that one is non-existent in one's possibility in eternity without beginning. God is said to have manifested Himself to the non-existent in this state, and so He knew, determined and then created this non-existent thing. On p.164 he states that we are the community of determined possibles which are decreed in His knowledge. It is important to note al-Nābulusī's consistent use of such terms to denote creation.

⁴⁹ This, like many of the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī himself, echoes themes to be found in *falsafa* and *'ilm al-kalām*. Before exploring these insofar as is relevant here, it can only be argued that both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī would have been masters of these areas of scholastic endeavour. Arnaldez, R, 'Falsafa', in *EI²* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), II, 769-775 (771-2), presents a noteworthy survey of the issue of existence-essence in the first period of *falsafa* (3rd/9th-5th/11th centuries). He states that *falsafa* was a method of inquiry independent of dogma, but not rejecting dogma or ignoring its sources. It faced similar problems to *'ilm kalām*. An example is that of existence-essence. The Mu'tazila strove to establish the absolute transcendence of God by distinguishing between essence and existence in created things. The Creator was seen as bestowing existence on essences which are in a state of nothingness. God, whom nothing resembles, was said to be beyond this. *Falsafa* took up this problem of ontology. *Falsafa* maintained the absolute transcendence and unity of God while preserving the distinction between essence and existence in all things other than God. For God only is existence identical with essence. Thus, *falsafa* attempts to unite two seemingly contrary concepts of the universe: emanationist monism where there is a continuity of being; and the absolute transcendence of God the Creator where there is an ontological discontinuity. See also Goodman, LE,

When the Divine Essence chooses to appear to the non-existent possible determined things - the 'we' - then the Essence is differentiated into attributes, names, deeds and *alḥkām*.⁵⁰ It is clear that the Divine Essence does choose to appear to Its creation, which means that the Essence is known. It can only be known in the state of divinity. Al-Nābulusī acknowledges that creation has a god and this state of having a god means that they are subject to a divine being.

Al-Nābulusī describes his understanding of what it means to have a god by stating that a god possesses all the needs of his servants in terms of existention and assistance. Having implied that all creation is composed of non-existent possible determined things or essences, it follows that they must depend on something other than themselves for their existence. This is provided by their God who possesses their existential needs. The Divine Essence is a God for what is other than it because they are in need of existention. However, it is not its own God because it needs nothing else to bring it into existence - it is necessarily existent. This is the function of the God of creation according to al-Nābulusī's statements in this context.

Furthermore, al-Nābulusī elaborates his understanding of divinity. To be divine means that something possesses the attributes, names, deeds and *alḥkām* that creation attributes adjectivally to the necessary Essence. God is divine only in relation to the worlds which need Him in order to enter into existence from their essentially non-

Avicenna (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.67, 70, 74, 76-7, 96; and Goichon, AM, 'Ibn Sīnā', in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1971), III, 941-7. It will be noted in this chapter that al-Nābulusī attempts to reconcile these two contrary concepts of the universe, whereas Ibn 'Arabī seems rooted in the emanationist monism of ontological continuity.

⁵⁰ Al-Nābulusī clarifies this on p.149 by stating that God only appears to be described by the attributes, names, and so on, since the Essence is not actually described by them.

existent and possible state. In relation to Himself God is essentially in no need of the worlds. However, in relation to the worlds God is in need of them in order to be attributed with and known by attributes, names, deeds and *ahkām*.

Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī are in broad agreement here. However, they do emphasise different things. Whereas Ibn ʿArabī emphasises the similarity and intermingling between the known God and creation, while ignoring the concept of the unknown God, al-Nābulusī stresses the difference between the known God and creation, while constantly acknowledging the position and importance of the unknown God. Furthermore, al-Nābulusī is original in his use of terms in describing these concepts, viz. *ijmāl* and *tafṣīl*.

Knowledge

That this chapter has an important epistemological component is clear from the discussion of the Divine Essence. Furthermore, this epistemological component provides another perspective on al-Nābulusī's introduction to his commentary. In that earlier context, he classified mankind into three categories which were dependent on states of knowledge of and faith in God. He also mentioned that the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* was concerned with the people of the highest category only - the people of witnessing. In the chapter on Ibrāhīm, al-Nābulusī begins a series of discussions about how God knows man and how man knows God.

Al-Nābulusī argues that God is the one who brings everything into existence:

The existence which belongs to beings is from God and nothing else.⁵¹

Once things are in existence they can know God.⁵² God depends on these things for Himself to be known. These things and their states determine the corpus of His knowledge. They constitute the object of His knowledge. Thus, God's ability to know and be known is connected with the things comprising creation.⁵³

He only knows something in accordance with what it is in itself. ... Divine knowledge has no effect (*athar*) with respect to existentionation (*ḡāḍ*) or specification (*takhṣīṣ*) on what is known at all. [This is] because it [the divine knowledge] reveals it [what is known] in accordance with what it actually is. If it were to reveal it with something more or less so that it were to have an effect on it, then it would not be knowledge, rather it would be ignorance.⁵⁴

Without these objects of knowledge, God would know nothing. Thus, in one sense, they are as necessary as He is. This emphasises the mutually necessary relationship between God and His creation. Creation is necessary for God to be known by what is other than Him. God is necessary for creation to be existent. This reiterates the main point of the previous discussion of the Divine Essence. This is, arguably, the dominant theme in al-Nābulusī's commentary on this chapter.

The differentiation of the *ijmāl* of the Divine Essence is engendered through creation's being brought into existence. That is to say, that as God brings the non-

⁵¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 154. See the chapter on Zakariyyā where the connection between God, mercy and existence is discussed in depth. Also, al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 148-9, has already discussed the Essence as being god through Its meeting the existential needs of Its creation.

⁵² It has been shown how all things other than God are responsible for God being known. God knows Himself through them. Without them God is one and unknown through an 'other.' However, God still knows them in His one eternally pre-existent knowledge. The paradox here is that God's pre-existent knowledge is 'lost' in the oneness of the Divine Essence until that Essence's oneness is brought out into the multiplicity of attributes, names, and effects that constitute creation.

⁵³ This introduces the traditional Sufi dichotomy of knower (*ʿālim*) and known (*maʿlūm*). On the one hand, God is *ʿālim* and His creation is *maʿlūm*. On the other hand, creation is *ʿālim* and God is *maʿlūm*. However, it is clear from al-Nābulusī that the Divine Essence in Itself is never *maʿlūm*, only the Divine attributes and names.

⁵⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 155.

existent objects of His knowledge into existence, God is making Himself known through these things:

You are non-existent. And so He revealed you through His eternally pre-existent knowledge and brought you into existence thus. You were not a mentioned thing⁵⁵ and so He made you a mentioned thing through His existentionation of you and through His determining (*ḥukm*) of you in accordance with what He knew of you from your determining (*ḥukm*) of yourself. And so all your states are from you to Him firstly in non-existence; and from Him to you secondly in existence.⁵⁶

God knows all things as they actually are in His eternally pre-existent knowledge. In His Divine Essence there is no difference between His Essence and His knowledge:

The attributes of God are the same as His Essence.⁵⁷

The dynamics of His knowledge in this plane are utterly unknowable. However, al-Nābulusī has argued that it is creation that differentiates the *ijmāl* of the Essence into four 'planes of Being' (*ḥaḍarāt*). These are the attributes, names, deeds and *aḥkām*. This elaboration is a notable difference from Ibn ʿArabī. From the Essence's perspective these are the same as the Essence.⁵⁸ However, once creation is

⁵⁵ This seems to be an allusion to Qur'ān 76:1: 'Has there not been over man a long period of time, when he was not a mentioned thing?'

⁵⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 157. See the chapter on Zakariyyā which discusses al-Nābulusī's understanding of the metaphor of God's mentioning something and thereby bringing it into existence.

⁵⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 149. See also p.150, where he says, 'since they [the attributes, names, deeds, and *aḥkām*] in relation to Him [God] are the same as the Essence.'

⁵⁸ See Nettler, 'The Figure', pp.25-6 & 31-2, where he states that the Divine Essence and attributes were the basic formulation and description of God's nature found in various trends of Islamic thought. Many interpretations of this way of understanding God were expressed in Islamic thought, sometimes resulting in fierce intellectual polemics. The relationship between the Essence and the attributes was particularly contentious. For example, Hourani, GF, *Islamic Rationalism - the Ethics of ʿAbd al-Jabbār* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.97, states that ʿAbd al-Jabbār, like most of his Muʿtazilī predecessors, maintained a sharp distinction between God's Essence and His acts and their attributes, thus making logically possible a perfect Essence combined with evil acts. Ibn ʿArabī disagrees with the 'conventional' thought which posits the Divine Essence/Attribute distinction where there may be an 'essential God' who is somehow knowable to us apart from His attributes. For Ibn ʿArabī the

existent, these ‘planes of Being’ are known in their differentiation. This differentiation occurs through the self or soul (*nafs*) of creation (or perhaps only the mystic).⁵⁹

At this juncture, al-Nābulusī elucidates his exegesis of the Sufi adage cited by Ibn ‘Arabī:

Whoever knows his self [or soul], knows his Lord.⁶⁰

This self is said to be a possible thing which is sustained on God’s four ‘planes of Being’. Al-Nābulusī has been consistent in stating that creation is the totality of non-existent possible things or determinations (*al-maqdūrāt*) which encompass quantity, manner, time and space. These possible things are also known as archetypes. This totality of possible things is subject to the divine (*ma’lūh*) and as such makes the Divine Essence a God. ‘Lordliness’ is linked to divinity, which is the totality of the four eternally pre-existent ‘planes of Being.’

Al-Nābulusī means that whoever knows their self as a non-existent possible thing will also know their lord who is the totality of the four eternally pre-existent ‘planes of Being.’ After all, it follows that the Divine Essence is only known as the attributes, names, deeds and *ahkām*. At the same time, this person would be aware that his self is sustained upon these four ‘planes of Being’ on the level of existence, yet these ‘planes of Being’ need him to be known.

attributes are God. Note that for al-Nābulusī, these attributes are God *from* the perspective of the Essence.

⁵⁹ Evidence to suggest that it is the soul/self of the mystic in question comes on p.150 where al-Nābulusī states, ‘the gnostic knowledge of God which is possible for everyone is the gnostic knowledge of an unseen essence in its *ijmāl* from which the soul/self of the mystic has differentiated the unseen attributes also, and the names, deeds and the *ahkām*’.

There is an element of reciprocity in this which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain if there is any priority among these things. This is an important point since the Qur'ānic God is the Creator and Originator of all things.⁶¹ Any suggestion of God's lack of priority over His creation would incur the criticism of Islamic tradition. For al-Nābulusī the Essence does exist *a priori* as the *ijmāl*, but is not known by any other thing until creation, notably man, is known. And as soon as man is known, the *ijmāl* of the Essence is differentiated into the four 'planes of Being' which sustain man.⁶²

Before explaining al-Nābulusī's views of the threefold appreciation of God among mankind, it is important to reiterate his view of mankind. It has already been elaborated that al-Nābulusī viewed the world in a hierarchical form, where certain people could have a more extensive and profound knowledge of and faith in God than others depending on their position in that hierarchy.⁶³ In the present context, al-Nābulusī cites Qur'ān 37:164 to support his contention that this hierarchy exists: There is not one of us save that he has a known position.⁶⁴

Al-Nābulusī states that the laws of religion (*al-sharā'i'*) are addressed to the generality of mankind and not the elite (*al-khiṭāb 'ala 'l-umūm lā 'l-khuṣūṣ*).⁶⁵ Al-

⁶⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 149-50.

⁶¹ Gardet, 'Allah', 406.

⁶² It is noteworthy that al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn 'Arabī in stating that Muḥammad is the most knowledgeable creature there has ever been with respect to the knowledge of God. See al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 150.

⁶³ See the chapter on al-Nābulusī's Introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

⁶⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 156.

Nābulusī is making a very important distinction between what he calls the generality (*al-ʿumūm*) and the elite (*al-khuṣūṣ*) of mankind.

The generality of mankind, for whom the divinely originated religious laws were revealed, are said to possess weak intellects. The generality of mankind are also said to be numerous. Furthermore, they are said to be those who believe in the unseen world, but do not have any gnostic knowledge of it. It was for this reason that they were in a state of ignorance prior to the coming of Islam. Al-Nābulusī quotes Qurʾān 14:4 and gives a little historical exegesis of it to support this point:

‘We only sent a messenger with the language of his people to make [things] clear for them.’ The people of the messenger of God, Muḥammad, were the people of ignorance, the possessors of weak intellects.⁶⁶

Furthermore, he argues:

The tool of the generality [of mankind] in apprehending [things] is the intellect (*al-ʿaql*), but the elite have another, different tool which is insight (*al-baṣīra*) enlightened by the Light of God. It [insight] is only different to intellect in turning to or away from God. Every intellect either turns to or away [from God]. Insight is created from [the intellect’s] turning [to God] while weak intellects [are created] from its turning [from God]. The language of religious Law is the language of weak intellects.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 156.

⁶⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 156.

⁶⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 156. Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism*, p.20, argues that ʿAbd al-Jabbār benefits from the major division of knowledge into immediate (*dar ʿūrī*) and acquired (*muktasab*). It is noted that this was a well-established division, taken as primary also by the Ashʿarite dogmatists of his time, Bāqillānī and ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī. On pp.129-130, Hourani states that ʿAbd al-Jabbār, like all Muʿtazila, fully accepted two sources of ethical knowledge, reason and revelation. Revelation is classified as acquired, because its acceptance is based on reasoning. However, many believers in Medieval Islam, according to Hourani (p.135), were dissatisfied with this role for revelation and reacted strongly against the rationalists. Gardet, L, ‘*Ilm al-Kalām*’, in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1971), III, 1141-1150 (1146) states that the primary basis of *ʿIlm al-Kalām* is that a harmony is to be acknowledged between religious law and the efforts of reasons brought to bear on it. He adds that for both Muʿtazilism and Ashʿarism the religious Law is the bearer of absolute truth and, as such, it defines the limits of reason and controls its activity. Al-Nābulusī makes a distinction between reason and revelation. Revelation, for him, has the power to support weak intellects or reason. Indeed, weak reason needs revelation in order to find God. However, strong intellects or reason, which he calls insight, find God through God’s light. It is implied that revelation is not needed by insight in order to find God.

Since the generality of people are said to be the audience of the religious Law or revelation and since their instrument of apprehending things is said to be a weak intellect, they constitute the people of ignorance. Furthermore, this qualifies al-Nābulusī's portrayal of mankind as forming a hierarchy which appears to be a permanent aspect of mankind. It is implied that the generality of people at all times have weak intellects and thus need the religious Laws. From al-Nābulusī's Sufi perspective, they constitute the people of ignorance.

By contrast, there is the situation of the elite of mankind. They turn towards God by nature. Their intellects are strong and are in fact known as instruments of divinely illuminated insight. The implication is that the religious Law (*al-sharā'i*) is not for them or that they can penetrate its outer shell, its language, since that is directed at the ignorant masses. These are said to be very few in number. They are said to possess the revelation of God's 'planes of Being' (*ḥaḍarāt*).⁶⁸ Furthermore, al-Nābulusī sub-divides them into the elite (*al-khāṣṣa*) and the elite of the elite (*khāṣṣa al-khāṣṣa*).⁶⁹ From this perspective, al-Nābulusī elaborates his understanding of the three forms of knowing God.⁷⁰ These are the traditional Sufi modes of knowing God - 'the first separation', 'the union after the first separation', and 'the union of the union' or

⁶⁸ It is assumed from the correspondence of terms that these *ḥaḍarāt* are the four 'planes of Being' described earlier, notably the attributes, names, deeds and *aḥkām* of God.

⁶⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 156.

⁷⁰ Izutsu, T, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things - Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy* (Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1994), pp.21-6, delineates the same tripartite division of mankind that al-Nābulusī establishes here.

‘the second separation.’⁷¹ This paradigm is neither discussed nor mentioned in Ibn ‘Arabī’s text on Ibrāhīm.

Al-Nābulusī describes the first separation (*al-farq al-awwal*) thus:

The first separation in which are [to be found] the generality of people. This is the witnessing of themselves and everything else only. [It is also] the absence from the witnessing of God. However, they witness the universal [God] in a specific, partial, intellectual or sensory locus of manifestation. They worship Him in it. However, the Law has forbidden them the worship of a sensory locus of manifestation, such as an idol or star and so on. It [the Law] has not forbidden them the worship of an intellectual locus of manifestation; although that is heresy in the next world, it is not so in this world according to the letter of the Law.⁷²

According to this statement, the generality of mankind have a view of reality in which all things are separated and from which God is utterly transcendent. This is a view endorsed by revelation. They only witness themselves and the world around them. They do not witness God at all. It is implied that the vision of God which they do not have is the true ‘universal’ vision of God. It is explicit that they do witness Him in ‘specific’, partial, intellectual or sensory forms - without necessarily really knowing Him. This is an explanation of the existence of the worship of stone or celestial idols. Such worship is forbidden by the Law. However, the worship of God in specific intellectual concepts is not forbidden by the Law in this world, only in the next. This

⁷¹ Izutsu, *Creation*, p.16, states that separation (*farq*) refers mainly to the common-sense view of reality, that is to say the separation of the Absolute from the phenomenal, relative world. Furthermore, all things are separated from one another by essential demarcations, for example mountain and river are essentially different from one another. He adds (pp.17-8) that the innumerable things stand opposed to the Absolute as two entirely different ontological domains between which there is no internal relationship. He states (pp.16-7) that at the stage of gathering [union] (*jam*) there is said to be only the believer witnessing God, and God alone, without seeing any creature. In fact, even the limitation of the ego of the believer disappears. The next stage (pp.17-8) is where all the things that were gathered up into unity are again separated from one another as so many different entities. This stage is known as separation after unification (*farq ba‘d al-jam*) or second separation (*farq thānī*). It is added (p.18) that the second separation is not sheer multiplicity, rather all the essential demarcations of the things, although clearly observable, are known to be nothing other than so many self-determinations of the absolute unity itself.

⁷² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 151.

form of worship is condoned by Islam as long as God is worshipped as an intellectual or imaginary concept, not as a sensory form, which is *kufr*.

This is elaborated further in al-Nābulusī's interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī's main poem in the chapter:⁷³

And in another of my states, which is the state of His [God's] absence from me in my appearance to myself among the essences appearing to me from me and everything else, I deny His appearance in anything of them [the essences] owing to the dominance of otherness over sameness. And so He knows me then in this second state and I have no knowledge of Him in it. This is because if He knows me, He has separated me from Him and has differentiated me from His *ijmāl*. Thus, this second state occurs to me and so I enter into separation, thereby denying Him in my form and having no knowledge of Him in it.⁷⁴

The subject of the poem is in a state where he acknowledges himself and everything else like him, but denies God. God is absent from him, and, presumably, transcendent from this realm of reality. He has no knowledge of God, but God knows him since He [God] has separated him from the *ijmāl* of His Essence. Thus, God witnesses him, but he does not witness God. He only witnesses himself and everything else like himself. Al-Nābulusī explains this:

If He [God] witnesses me in my form, but does not witness Himself, then I witness my form and deny Him in it since I do not witness Him in it.⁷⁵

Al-Nābulusī also states that if God manifests Himself through witnessing His creation, then creation witnesses itself and nothing else.⁷⁶ While in this state of witnessing itself only, creation believes that its form is complete and independent.

⁷³ Ibn 'Arabī's poem is: He praises me and I praise Him. He worships me and I worship Him. But in a state [of being] I affirm Him and in the archetypes (*al-ʿayān*) I deny Him. He knows me and I am ignorant of Him. But I know Him and so witness Him. Where is [His] independence when I help Him and make Him happy? Thus God brings me into existence while I know Him and so bring Him into existence. In this way the [divine] word comes to us and He realises His intention in us.

⁷⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 160.

⁷⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 160.

Thus, it seems to depend on nothing else in any way.⁷⁷ The implication is that this completeness and independence are on the level of existence. Al-Nābulusī has been consistent in maintaining creation's utter need for existence from God. God alone can satisfy this need since He is existence. Thus, al-Nābulusī argues that separation alone is error, forgetfulness [of God], and tyranny.⁷⁸ In effect, the belief in separation alone is an existential heresy, since it posits the possibility of another existence apart from God's.

For al-Nābulusī the state of the first separation is one that belongs to the generality of mankind who possess weak intellects and that it alone is error and forgetfulness of God. It elucidates his reasoning for the generality's need for the religious Law to keep them on the straight path prescribed by God through His prophets.

The next state possible for mankind belongs to the elite and is called union after the first separation. Al-Nābulusī states:

In this revelation the witnessing of ourselves and of others is absent from us due to our immersion in the witnessing of God in the universal [God], which is the station of union after the first separation.⁷⁹

The revelation mentioned in this quotation is that God Himself is the same as the world which is the evidence for His existence.⁸⁰ Al-Nābulusī says:

He [God] is the same as the evidence (*al-dalīl*), what is proven (*al-madlūl*), and what is drawing conclusions (*al-mustadill*). There is nothing in being except Him [God] appearing through the form

⁷⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 161.

⁷⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 160.

⁷⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 161.

⁷⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 151.

⁸⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 150.

of every non-existent possible thing because of His holding the non-existing forms with His power which is the same as His Essence.⁸¹

This quotation suggests that the mystic witnesses a oneness in which there is no differentiation. The oneness is God. There is only God. Unity is clearly dominating multiplicity, which has disappeared. In this sense, creation is through God and He appears and acts through creation. God is said to do everything that creation does.⁸² This is because there is only God. Al-Nābulusī highlights the fact that this revelation is not as high as the one that follows it - the second separation or union of union:

The person who has the first revelation says, 'we are all through Him [God].' The person who has the second revelation, which is higher, says, 'we are all through us not through Him [God], however in Him [God] and not in us.'⁸³

Again, al-Nābulusī elaborates this state of union in his exegesis of Ibn 'Arabī's main poem in the chapter:

And so in one of [my] states, which is the state of His [God's] appearance to me which is expressed as the state of my annihilation from myself, I acknowledge Him through His appearance in my locus of manifestation to me where there is no I. ... If He knows Himself, then He gathers me to Him and makes me an *ijmāl* in His differentiation. Thus, this first state occurs to me and so I enter into the heart of union. Thereby, I acknowledge Him and deny myself, having no knowledge of it [myself] at the moment of His appearance. Thus, he [the poet] said, 'I know Him [God]' in the first state 'and witness Him [God]' in it.⁸⁴

The subject of the poem is in a state where he acknowledges God but denies himself and everything else like him. He has neither knowledge of himself nor of what is other than him, since God has gathered him up in His *ijmāl* while still existent in the world of differentiation or multiplicity. Thus, God knows the subject of the poem and

⁸¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 150. See the first section of this chapter which deals with the issue of the Divine Essence. See also the chapter on Zakariyyā which discusses the relationship of the attributes and names of God to the Divine Essence.

⁸² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 152.

⁸³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 152.

Himself. There is a denial of the 'I' which is the ego of the subject. The 'I' does not witness itself, just God. In fact, it is God that does this witnessing.⁸⁵ God witnesses Himself and the subject of the poem witnesses God, denying all else. Al-Nābulusī explains this:

If He [God] witnesses Himself in my form, I too witness Him in it, having no knowledge of anything else.⁸⁶

Al-Nābulusī adds that if God manifests Himself through witnessing Himself in the form of His creation, then creation witnesses God in the forms of creation.⁸⁷ While in this state of witnessing God in the forms of creation, creation believes that its forms are God's creation subsisting upon God. The subsistence that God provides is existence, since God provides existential subsistence for all creation. Thus, creation is existentially dependent upon God.⁸⁸ It is not stated that union alone is error, forgetfulness of God, and tyranny. Furthermore, it is not stated that it is light, guidance, and perfection either. It is apparent that this revelation is not as high in the mystical hierarchy as the second revelation, which belongs to the state of the union of the union, or the second separation.

Al-Nābulusī describes the final, ultimate state in the following manner, also giving some detail to what the revelation encompasses:

⁸⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 160.

⁸⁵ See chapter on al-Nābulusī's introduction to the commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* where he explains that angels and possessors of knowledge only witness God through delegating authority to God; God is the sole agent of the act of witnessing.

⁸⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 160.

⁸⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 161.

⁸⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 160.

And then the other sound revelation comes, which is the station of the second separation due to realisation through God and creation.⁸⁹ And so this other revelation shows you our forms - the community of non-existent, determined possibles - in Him [God], that is to say in the existence of God's Essence. Do not speak of incarnation, because the non-existent possibles have no existence other than that of God's Essence so that they might incarnate themselves in the existence of God. Incarnation is only between two things which are existent through two [distinct] existences. However, here there is only one existence; and the one existence does not incarnate itself in itself.⁹⁰

This revelation, higher than the previous one, is quite different in substance to what was previously revealed. Whereas previously the revelation was that God was the same as the world which was the evidence for His existence, here all the non-existent forms that constitute creation are revealed as being 'in' the existence of God's Essence. Thus, whereas previously the non-existent possibles were dissolved in the unity of God, here their multiplicity returns, but 'in' the oneness of God's existence.⁹¹

Al-Nābulusī is at pains to establish and explain the fact that the concept of incarnation (*ḥulūl*) is not involved. The essential non-existence of the possible things prohibits them from incarnating themselves in the existence of God's Essence. Rather, they are dependent on God for existence, which explains why they are awash in the sea of His existence. Without this existence they would remain in their non-existent state.⁹²

⁸⁹ See al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 117, where, in the chapter on 'Uzair, it is argued that realisation (*taḥaqquq*) is a form of gnosis (*ma'rifa*).

⁹⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 151.

⁹¹ See the chapter on Zakariyyā, (al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217), which argues that the One Essence is mercy. There are the archetypes of the divine names in this Essence. These archetypes 'demand' their existence. The Essence gives them existence and they appear as the divine names. The divine names appear in forms through the archetypes of the effects (*āthār*), which, in turn, demand their own existence. The Essence as divine mercy encompasses them and brings them into existence through the divine names. These effects are originated and constitute creation. The divine mercy determines them to be effects, by which they are made to be imperfect in contrast to the perfection of the divine names.

⁹² As earlier, he establishes and continues to maintain fundamental differences between God and man possibly due to the context of the centuries' old polemics over certain issues arising out of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas. Al-Nābulusī establishes that there is no hint of the concepts of incarnation or union in what he

The mystic witnesses an existential oneness in which ‘resides’ a multiplicity of the forms of non-existent possible things. The oneness is God’s existence, while the multiplicity is the forms of creation. Unity and multiplicity are balanced, giving the ‘highest’ appreciation of reality.⁹³ In this sense, creation is through itself but in God. As such, creation performs its own acts but in God.⁹⁴

Whereas in the previous revelation the mystic witnesses that there is only God, in this revelation he witnesses the difference between God and creation:

Everything is from us with regard to possibility, predisposition, and acceptance, while everything is from Him [God] with regard to existentiatio and manifestation. He [God] said, ‘Say everything is from the presence of God (*min ‘inda ‘llāh*).’ [Qur’ān 4:78] He did not say, ‘from God (*min Allāh*).’ because ‘the presence of God’ is the presence of the non-existent ranks of possibility in His knowledge.⁹⁵

Al-Nābulusī is distinguishing between God, from which nothing comes, and the presence of God, from which everything comes.⁹⁶ The non-existent ranks of possibility are utterly different from God with regard to existence, which they utterly lack. However, they are resident in God’s knowledge, which from the Sublime Essence’s perspective is the same as Itself. The question begs to be asked whether there is a

is elucidating. Charges of incarnation or union were frequently levelled at Ibn ‘Arabī and the school of thought that arose out of his writings. See Knysh, AD, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition - the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

⁹³ Izutsu, *Creation*, p.26 says that only through this single act of cognition is a whole integral view of Reality as it really is grasped. This is the fundamental intuition of the one single reality of *existence* in everything without exception. In the Absolute (God, theologically), *existence* in its absolute purity and unconditionality is seen. In the things of the phenomenal world, the concrete differentiations of the selfsame reality of *existence* in accordance with its own inner articulations are recognised. Philosophically this is the position of ‘Unity of Being’ (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).

⁹⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 152.

⁹⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 151-2.

⁹⁶ This seems to present two concepts of God - one is the utterly transcendent God who is completely unknown, the other is the known God who is seemingly responsible for bringing everything into existence. In this sense, the latter concept of God seems equivalent to ideas of the Demiurge, which dirties its ‘hands’ in the act of bringing originated possible determined things into existence. The transcendent God is kept clean of such ‘malodorous’ tasks. This is discussed in more depth in the chapter on Muḥammad.

distinction between God's knowledge, the content of that knowledge, and His Essence, when matters are appreciated from the perspective of that Essence. Al-Nābulusī is silent on this issue.

Nevertheless, the non-existent ranks of possibility are said to depend on God for existence. They possess possibility, predisposition and acceptance. Furthermore, they are said to possess quiddities, their states, and the act of distinguishing between them. God possesses existence and the act of manifestation.⁹⁷

God is needed for the existence He imparts, but the non-existent possible things, in their various ranks, give to God their possibility, predisposition and acceptance. It is through them that God is differentiated out of His *ijmāl*, thus becoming God rather than remaining the Divine Essence. Thus, creation appears through itself, acts through itself, and forcefully determines itself through itself, but in the infinite existence of God's Essence:

God has not done through them what they have done; rather, they are doing through themselves all of what they have done, because He [God] knew them thus and so brought them into existence in accordance with His knowledge.⁹⁸

Al-Nābulusī expounds on the state of second separation in his exegesis of Ibn

‘Arabī’s main poem in the chapter:

And so His [God’s] help is His appearance where there is no we, while our help is our appearance where there is no He. So, He [God] has the *ḥukm* in union, while we have the *ḥukm* in separation. Thus, some of the infallible people implored in His [God’s] saying, ‘My Lord! Give me a judgement [or *ḥukm*]!’⁹⁹ So he asked for separation, and then He [God] said, ‘Make me one of the righteous!’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 151.

⁹⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 153.

⁹⁹ Qur’ān 26:83.

¹⁰⁰ Qur’ān 26:83. Al-Nābulusī uses ‘*wa j’alnī*’ rather than ‘*wa lḥiqnī*’. However, from the context it is clear that although he changed the verb in the second half of this Qur’ānic verse, it is the same verse that is cited.

That is [make me one of] the people of union, because separation alone is error, forgetfulness, and tyranny, but with union - which is called the union of union and the second separation - it is light, guidance, and perfection due to the utter lack of needs of the[se] two aspects which belong to God in the plane of His knowledge.¹⁰¹

Al-Nābulusī states that in the state of union alone, God has the *ḥukm*. This state is where everything dissolves into the unity of the existence of God's Essence. Only God is witnessed. There is no 'we' which is in contradistinction to Him. Equally, it is stated that in the state of separation alone, creation - the 'we' - has the *ḥukm*. This state is where everything is distinct and differentiated. God is not witnessed, only creation. There is no 'He', only 'we.'

Al-Nābulusī has explained, using a Qur'ānic citation for support, that the mystic seeking the fullest, most complete revelation asks for both separation, which is judgement (or *ḥukm*) in the Qur'ānic verse, and union, which is the grace of becoming one of the righteous. It is this idea of someone reaching an awareness of both aspects of reality - the 'He' and the 'we' - that results in discussions of the relationship between them. These aspects are neither utterly separated nor utterly unified as al-Nābulusī's various statements imply. They are in need of each other.

The Reciprocity of Nourishment

The dependency of God on man and of man on God has been emphasised in the above sections. Although different, God and man have similar needs of dependency on another entity, whether existent or non-existent. Al-Nābulusī makes use of the Qur'ānic stories provided by Ibn 'Arabī to elaborate his interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī's

¹⁰¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 161.

discussions on the relationship between God and man, as typified in the case of the prophetic figure of Ibrāhīm.

The discussion of the section on God's Divine Essence began with an explication of al-Nābulusī's exegesis of a Qur'ānic story concerning Ibrāhīm. That exegesis encapsulated al-Nābulusī's understanding of the central themes of the chapter. The Qur'ānic story concerned Ibrāhīm asking God for the favour of knowing how his Lord can perform miraculous acts such as resuscitating the dead. This led into a discussion of the relationship between God and man, and how they know each other. This story is not used by Ibn 'Arabī. He uses the Qur'ānic stories concerning Ibrāhīm being God's friend and his feeding of others.¹⁰² Al-Nābulusī comments on these Qur'ānic citations and develops Ibn 'Arabī's use of them in his own distinct way.

Before discussing al-Nābulusī's explication of the concepts of friendship and nourishment in the context of Ibrāhīm, it is worth highlighting a few points that he seems to stress. Firstly, he makes it clear that Ibrāhīm is a kind of archetypal Sufi wayfarer:

The wisdom of Ibrāhīm is characterised by rapturous love because his [Ibrāhīm's] reality is in rapturous love with the love of God; and so, it [his reality] has reached the station of friendship from the station of love such that he began to find God, who holds him, penetrating every part of him with respect to the fact that what he finds is due to the perfection of the merciful possession of the corporeal

¹⁰² Ibrāhīm as friend, Qur'ān 4:125; Ibrāhīm feeding others, Qur'ān 11:69, and Qur'ān 51:24-30. Firestone, R, *Journeys in Holy Lands - the evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael legends in Islamic exegesis* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1990), p.19, says that Islamic legends about Ibrāhīm are influenced by the Biblicist legends extant in pre-Islamic Arabia and early Islamic society, but they also exhibit influences from indigenous Arabian culture as well as styles, structures, and motifs that are unique to Islam. On p.58, he adds that most of the commentary literature about the angels' visit to Ibrāhīm and his hospitality consists of running Islamic commentaries, unauthoritative traditions with many of the earmarks of Biblicist legends, and brief non-narrative exegesis dating from the Islamic period.

and spiritual world, and not with respect to what He [God] actually is in relation to His Sublime Self.¹⁰³

In the above citation al-Nābulusī is discussing Ibrāhīm as though he were a Sufi progressing along a path divided into spiritual stations. He mentions only two such stations - those of love and friendship. The word which he uses for friendship (*al-khulla*) is related by its constituent root consonants to the word for penetration (*al-takhallul*) which he uses to describe God's action upon the reality of Ibrāhīm. In this manner, he is engaging in the same style of semantic wordplay in which Ibn ʿArabī also engages. Furthermore, al-Nābulusī has also maintained the difference between God in His Divine Essence and God as known or experienced by His creation.

It is noteworthy that al-Nābulusī has already given an indication of the importance of Ibrāhīm's discovery, in the station of friendship, that God is appearing to him through him. In this way, he has already commented on Ibn ʿArabī's use of the motif of Ibrāhīm being God's friend.

Al-Nābulusī cites Qur'ān 4:125 when commenting on Ibn ʿArabī's use of the appellation 'friend' that is applied to Ibrāhīm:

And God took Ibrāhīm as a friend.¹⁰⁴

At this point, al-Nābulusī stresses the fact that this friendship is reciprocal. He says that if Ibrāhīm is God's friend, then God must be Ibrāhīm's friend. In terms of

¹⁰³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 144.

Arabic grammar, he states that the word ‘friend’ (*khalīl*) is one of the nouns of correlation, or reciprocal relation (*ism al-iḍāfa*), so that one of the two cannot be conceived in the mind without the other.¹⁰⁵ In terms of friendship, Ibrāhīm and God are in a reciprocal relation.

Al-Nābulusī states that on a par with the word ‘friend’ (*khalīl*) is the word ‘beloved’ (*ḥabīb*). It is stated that Muḥammad is both the beloved and friend of God.¹⁰⁶ Thus, God is Muḥammad’s beloved and friend. They, like God and Ibrāhīm, are in a reciprocal relationship. This is supported by a reference to a *ḥadīth*:

If I had taken someone as friend other than my Lord, I would have taken Abū Bakr.¹⁰⁷

For al-Nābulusī, this demonstrates that Muḥammad, like Ibrāhīm, was a friend of God. He examines the grammar of this *ḥadīth*, arguing that since Muḥammad took his Lord as friend, his Lord took him as friend too. They are thus in a reciprocal relationship.

Friendship for al-Nābulusī is a state of reciprocal relationship.¹⁰⁸ However, he distinguishes between Muḥammad and Ibrāhīm. Muḥammad’s friendship with God

¹⁰⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

¹⁰⁸ Trimingham, JS, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York & Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.224, states concerning al-Shaʿrānī’s thought that ‘although a ‘favourite’ of God, not even a *walī* can attain nearness to God, consequently we translate *walī* as God’s ‘protégé’ rather than ‘friend’, for friendship would naturally imply some degree of reciprocity in the relationship of the man and his God.’ This makes an interesting comparison and difference between these two Sufi thinkers. Al-Nābulusī clearly has no qualms about talking about reciprocity in the relationship ‘of the man and his God.’

was superior to Ibrāhīm's, because Muḥammad took God as his friend whereas God took Ibrāhīm as friend. Qur'ān 4:125 and the *ḥadīth* are quoted again to emphasise this difference in terms of activity and passivity:

And of the perfection of God's appearance in our Prophet Muḥammad was the act of taking being on his part and not on Ibrāhīm's. And so God said concerning Ibrāhīm, 'And God took Ibrāhīm as a friend.' And he [the Prophet] said concerning himself, 'If I had taken someone other than my Lord as friend, I would have taken Abū Bakr.' Thus, the two loci of manifestation and the two friendships were different.¹⁰⁹

Although al-Nābulusī has discussed friendship as being a state of reciprocal relationship, a given friendship can differ from another in terms of which of two friends was active in initiating it. Ibrāhīm, representative of mankind, is passive in his friendship with God. This is important for al-Nābulusī's understanding of this *faṣṣ*. However, for al-Nābulusī, Muḥammad is active in his friendship with God. Nevertheless, as is clear from the previous quotation, it must be borne in mind that al-Nābulusī also stresses the fundamental activity of God and the fundamental passivity of man - it is God who appears in the two loci of manifestation, which are known as Muḥammad and Ibrāhīm. Both seem passive before God in one respect, yet in another respect one of them appears active, the other passive.¹¹⁰

At this point, it is necessary to follow al-Nābulusī's understanding of the reasons for Ibrāhīm's being called 'friend'. He has already mentioned that Ibrāhīm found God permeating him, the root of which Arabic word (*takhallal*) is related to the

¹⁰⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

word for ‘friend’ (*khalīl*). However, these two reasons are parallel to the two revelations discussed earlier in the context of man’s knowledge of God. The first revelation was that God is the same as the world. The oneness of God dominates and dissolves the multiplicity of the ephemera of the world. The second revelation was that the multiplicity of the ephemera of the world are ‘in’ the existence of God’s Essence. This combines the seemingly real multiplicity of the world’s ephemera that the ordinary man witnesses with the utter oneness of God witnessed by the Sufi. The reasons for Ibrāhīm’s being called friend reflect this.

Al-Nābulusī states, echoing Ibn ‘Arabī, that the first reason is that Ibrāhīm pervades and encompasses all the attributes, names, deeds, and *ahkām* with which the Divine Essence is described. This seems to follow from his earlier explication of the differentiation of the Essence’s *ijmāl* into attributes and so on by the non-existent possibles that constitute creation. However, al-Nābulusī differs from Ibn ‘Arabī when he adds that this apparent action of pervasion and encompassment on Ibrāhīm’s part is a ‘metonym’ for the Divine Essence’s possession of him through all the four ‘planes of Being’ (the attributes and so on), and for Ibrāhīm’s acceptance of this:

And this pervasion and encompassment on Ibrāhīm’s part of what has been mentioned is a metonym for God’s possession of Ibrāhīm through all of what was mentioned and for Ibrāhīm’s acceptance of that possession.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ See the chapter on Muḥammad for a fuller discussion of Muḥammad’s function in al-Nābulusī’s thought as elucidated in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

¹¹¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

Al-Nābulusī mentions that the first reason for Ibrāhīm's being called 'friend' is correct according to the sense that:

The appearance of all the eternally pre-existent attributes of God through the originated accidental attributes [of creation] in a way in which the originated attributes disappear due to their essential non-existence and the eternally pre-existent attributes appear due to their essential existence with regard to the fact that they are same as the Essence, although [they are] other than the Essence in another respect.¹¹²

This reinforces the sense in which the originated, created Ibrāhīm and his accidental attributes are fundamentally passive in the face of God. God appears to him, penetrating and thus effacing him and his attributes. Thus, God appears through Ibrāhīm. God and Ibrāhīm are different, but Ibrāhīm is dissolved in the essentially existent attributes of God. There is a sense of communion which seems identical with union (*jam'*).

The second reason for Ibrāhīm being called 'friend of God' is because God pervades and possesses the existence of his form. This is because God supports it and brings it into being. Ibrāhīm's form remains strictly in accordance with God's knowledge and will. Its existence is only through God. Al-Nābulusī re-states that:

The second reason ... is correct also not according to the sense of incarnation (*al-ḥulūl*) or union (*al-ittiḥād*) since that is not conceived of by those who believe that God has the True Existence and that every created thing other than Him has no essential existence. Their existence is through Him. There is no other existent thing with Him in His rank. Although they are other than Him with regard to their forms and determinations (*maqāḍirihā*) and they are the same as Him with regard to their existence and immutability. It is not conceived of that an existent thing can incarnate itself in a non-existent thing nor that the former unite with the latter. ... One of them does not mix with the other.¹¹³

¹¹² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 146.

¹¹³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 146. This highlights again the importance of the need to challenge all charges of the 'heresy' of incarnation or union. This is a further indication of al-Nābulusī's reacting to the history of polemics over issues arising out of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas.

Al-Nābulusī implies that the second reason for Ibrāhīm being called ‘friend’ is correct according to the sense that God has the true existence and that all creation which is other than Him is essentially non-existent. Their existence is through God. Their multiplicity appears ‘in’ God’s existence, thus becoming, in a sense, existent through it. However, there is no other existent thing in the same rank as God. God is one in His existence, but with the multiplicity of non-existent possible determinations ‘in’ Him. If someone were unaware of God, this would be seen as the ‘first separation.’ However, if that person were aware of God, then this would be appreciated as the ‘second separation’ or ‘the union of union’. Nevertheless, al-Nābulusī does state:

Although they [created things] are different to Him [God] with regard to their forms and determinations they are the same as Him with regard to their existence and immutability.¹¹⁴

These reasons for Ibrāhīm’s being called ‘friend of God’ appear to be parallel to the revelations that the Sufis can have: firstly, there is the sense in which creation is dissolved in God who pervades them and whose essentially existent descriptions thereby efface their originated and essentially non-existent descriptions. There is a sense in which the first reason for Ibrāhīm’s name is equivalent to the annihilation of the mystic in God. However, there is also the aspect of creation’s non-existent forms existing in God; their multiplicity is affirmed and given reality through being in God. They are the same and yet different from God. This seems to be equivalent to the mystic’s awareness of the second separation.

¹¹⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 146.

There is another dimension to this theory. There is the aspect in which God needs Ibrāhīm for His attributes, names and so on to appear. They appear through him. Although Ibrāhīm is lost when they appear through him, without him they would not appear. Furthermore, there is the sense in which Ibrāhīm needs God for his form and determination to have existence. He appears in God's existence. Although he is existent when in God, without God he would have no existence at all. This is a reiteration of the theme of creation's need of existence from God and God's need to be known by creation. The theme of dependency is maintained.

There is a theme of nourishment here too: both God and Ibrāhīm offer different types of nourishment to each other, without which they would not be what they are. The nourishment is another facet of their dependence on each other.

During the chapter on Ibrāhīm and more specifically at its end, Ibn 'Arabī deals specifically with the aspect of Ibrāhīm's association with feeding others. Al-Nābulusī also brings this theme of nourishment up at different junctures but he makes the same underlying point consistently.

During the discussion of pervasion in the context of the reasons for Ibrāhīm being called 'friend', al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn 'Arabī in saying that whoever is active in penetrating something else is hidden in that thing and is food for it with regard to the fact that its subsistence is upon it. Whatever is nourished and subsisting upon

what is active is manifest. Whatever is manifest is thus passive.¹¹⁵ Al-Nābulusī

recognises that if creation, or Ibrāhīm, is hidden, then God is manifest. He adds:

Gnostics witness Him [God] like this without witnessing that creation has any other existence other than His existence so that creation has to be incarnate in God. However God's knowledge, will and power comprise the appearance of all the forms of the world.¹¹⁶

In this instance, creation is said to be all the names of God.¹¹⁷ This is equivalent to the earlier description of the first revelation enjoyed by some Sufis - the vision of union (*jam'*) and the state of annihilation (*fanā'*) in God.

Al-Nābulusī also follows Ibn 'Arabī in discussing the situation where God is hidden and Ibrāhīm is manifest. This is what Sufi gnostics who are close to God witness. When they witness this they also realise that God is all the attributes of creation.¹¹⁸ This is equivalent to the earlier description of the second revelation enjoyed by the elite of the elite of Sufis - the vision of union of union (*jam' al-jam'*) or the second separation (*al-farq al-thānī*) and the state of survival (*baqā'*) in God.

Al-Nābulusī, like Ibn 'Arabī, argues that food or nourishment is connected with the relationship between God and creation. If creation feeds God, then God is manifest, however if God feeds creation, then creation is manifest. This fits with the paradigm of *jam'* and *farq*. However, the issue of how something that is essentially non-existent being able 'to feed' what is existent emerges.

¹¹⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 148.

¹¹⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 148.

¹¹⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 148.

¹¹⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 148.

Al-Nābulusī states that Ibrāhīm is called ‘friend’ and established the tradition of feeding others, whether in groups or as individuals, because he possessed the rank which is the nourishment belonging to the two sides in the appearance of the essence or self. This is rather cryptic and so al-Nābulusī feels obliged to clarify it:

[This] is like the dye composed of two colours: one of them feeds the other in the appearance of that colour. It is also the union and separation that we mentioned with respect to God’s knowledge of Himself appearing to Himself in His non-existent possible matters¹¹⁹ and with respect to God’s knowledge of those non-existent possible matters through themselves. There is no doubt that the friend [Ibrāhīm] belongs to the totality of those matters, however he is separate from them through the awareness and revelation of what he actually is that is in his possibility and determination. Thus, he is characterised by this rank.¹²⁰

It has been argued that the elite of the elite Sufis witness themselves and the multiplicity of the world around them, but ‘in’ God. This is ‘*al-farq al-thānī*’ or ‘*jam^c*’ *al-jam^c*’. This synthesises the knowledge, vision or experience of the previous two levels of people in order to produce the most profound vision of ‘Reality’ available to man. In a sense, it is the synthesis of the two aspects of ‘Reality’ - the oneness and multiplicity of God and creation. This is encapsulated in the symbolic figure of Ibrāhīm who reveals the reciprocal relationship between God and His creation. Thus, Ibrāhīm is ‘the dye composed of two colours.’

Both Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Nābulusī make use of the Qur’ānic motifs surrounding Ibrāhīm with regard to feeding others. Al-Nābulusī has already hinted at what he has consistently argued: that God needs creation in order to be known by everything other than Him, and that creation is in utter need of Him in order to become existent. This fits into the paradigm of union (*jam^c*) and separation (*farq*), where food or

¹¹⁹ This echoes Qur’ān 55:29, ‘Every day He is in a matter/affair (*sha’n*).’

nourishment is connected with the reciprocal relationship between God and creation. If creation feeds God, then God is manifest. To be aware only of this, Sufi gnostics would be in a state of *jam*^c. However, if God feeds creation, then creation is manifest. If a Sufi gnostic is aware of this state, he would be either in a state of *farq awwal* or *farq thānī*, depending on his progress along the ‘Path’. Al-Nābulusī states:

You are His food, that is to say God’s food, through the *aḥkām*, which He took from you through His eternally pre-existent knowledge. And so He knew you through them. That is from the perspective of the rank of His divinity from which is His ability to know you, want you, determine you. From this perspective, He is fed by you and by your states so that there follows to Him the rank of divinity which is from the totality of ‘planes of Being’ which descend to you through that rank in the likeness of a body which needs food.¹²¹

It is through creation that the Divine Essence is differentiated into the four ‘planes of Being’ constituting the rank of divinity, which are the attributes, names, deeds, and *aḥkām*. Thus, God needs to be fed by creation in order to be known.

Creation can have different degrees of knowledge of God, but the fact is that God would not be known without creation to know Him. However, al-Nābulusī ensures that we understand that the imagery of food and body with respect to God is purely allegorical as his use of the word ‘likeness’ (*mithāl*) indicates. Indeed, a little later in describing the same phenomenon, he states explicitly that the food that penetrates the divine states, as though they were parts of a body, is done in a metaphorical manner and not a real one.¹²²

Al-Nābulusī has reiterated the earlier point in the section on the Divine Essence that God is not known until creation is known. Creation feeds God through being the

¹²⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 162-3.

¹²¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 158.

¹²² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 164.

object of His knowledge, which thereby enables Him to be known. He can only be known through the differentiation of the *ijmāl* of His Divine Essence into the attributes and so on which are revealed to man in the Qur'ān. However, in order for man to know God, he needs to exist. And so God feeds man through the gift of existence.

Al-Nābulusī states:

And He, that is God, is your food through existence which is pouring forth from Him upon you. However, there is no pouring forth nor food. That is a tool of connection through a specific term in order to convey the intended sense to the wayfarer. ... Thus, it is sound to state that there is the pouring forth of existence in one respect, but in another respect it is not sound.¹²³

It is noteworthy that al-Nābulusī stresses again the metaphorical nature of the language that he is using. God's existence is not really food. These are images and metaphorical concepts used to convey the point that al-Nābulusī wishes to make. This point is that man needs God in order to exist. There is a reciprocity of need. Although God in His Essence has no need at all of anything else, He does need creation in order to be known and worshipped. Creation needs the existence that only God can bestow in order to know God and worship Him.

And since we have stated that there is the dyeing of non-existent possible things with existence, we can state also that there is the dyeing of existence with non-existent possible things too. So, existence's being food for the non-existent possible things is sound because they are only existent through it. In themselves, they are pure non-existence. And the non-existent possible thing's being food for existence is sound too because it is enformed and shaped through them. And so it has appeared in forms and shapes to the senses and the intellect. But it is in itself pure existence utterly transcendent from all that.¹²⁴

Finally al-Nābulusī says:

There is no doubt that food is that upon which something subsists and survives. The allegory here is understood. The non-existent possible things have no subsistence and no survival save through existence. Likewise, existence, with respect to its appearing enformed through them, has no

¹²³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 158.

¹²⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 158-9.

subsistence nor survival save through them. But with respect to what it is in itself, there is no discussion of that at all.¹²⁵

The reciprocity of need between God and creation is at an epistemological and existential level. Al-Nābulusī explains this ‘metaphysical reality’ - that God needs creation to be known and that creation needs God’s existence to exist - with a discussion of what this actually means for Sufis who are travelling along the ‘Path’ to closeness to God. This closeness is described in epistemological terms. Ordinary people do not witness God, they only see themselves and the seemingly real world of multiplicity around them. The first level of the elite Sufis witness God only, losing sight of themselves and the world of multiplicity around them. This appreciation of ‘Reality’ is more profound than that enjoyed by ordinary people, however the highest level of the elite Sufis enjoys the most profound vision of ‘Reality’. They witness themselves and the multiplicity of the world around them, but ‘in’ God. This synthesises the knowledge, vision or experience of the previous two levels of people in order to produce the most profound vision of ‘Reality’ available to man. This level is typified in the wisdom of Ibrāhīm. For al-Nābulusī, the figure of Ibrāhīm demonstrates this ‘truth.’

In describing these epistemological categories, al-Nābulusī stresses that although God and man need each other for different, yet complementary reasons, God is essentially and utterly self-sufficient and utterly transcendent from the various worlds of His creation. Thus, although at one level al-Nābulusī is able to present a sophisticated picture of the interrelations and dependencies of God and man, he is also

¹²⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 159.

able to maintain the essential oneness and utter difference of God from His creation.

In this way, he finishes his commentary on the chapter with a ‘paradoxical’ statement:

God is in us despite His transcendence from us. God is not in us despite His connection to us. God is limited by us despite His transcendence in His Essence.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 165.

CHAPTER 5

Zakariyyā

Introduction

A contemporary scholar has noted that ‘the Qur’ānic story of Zakariyyā is a tale of God’s power and mercy, His mercy being the main expression of His power.’¹ Al-Nābulusī refers to this theme by commenting on the placement of the chapter on Zakariyyā within Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.² God’s mercy and power are revealed to Zakariyyā through His giving a son to Zakariyyā.³ Al-Nābulusī suggests that Ibn ‘Arabī places the chapter on Yaḥyā before that on his father, Zakariyyā, out of respect for God, who is the giver, and for Yaḥyā, who is the gift.⁴ Thus, al-Nābulusī recognises the fundamental role of power and mercy in the Qur’ānic stories surrounding Zakariyyā. He sees the role of God’s mercy and power in God’s giving

¹ Nettler, RL, ‘Ibn ‘Arabi’s Conception of God’s Universal Mercy: The Chapter on Zakariyya’ in the *Fusus al-Hikam*’, in *Consciousness and Reality - Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), pp.213-231 (p.214).

² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, 2 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1304-1323), II, 216.

³ The first fifteen verses of Qur’ān 19 are on the subject of Zakariyyā and his petitioning God for a son.

⁴ There is a structure in his thinking which establishes the giver (or the agent) as first, the gift (or action) as second or median, and the thing that receives the gift (the recipient) as third.

Zakariyyā a son. Like Ibn ʿArabī, al-Nābulusī transforms a personal and pietistic story into a metaphysical one.⁵

Ibn ʿArabī

It has been argued that Ibn ʿArabī's discussion of the Qur'ānic Zakariyyā is organised according to three themes: the metaphysics of God's mercy; the ethical implications of the divine metaphysical mercy; and the names and attributes, divine and otherwise, in the expression and manifestation of God's mercy.⁶ Ibn ʿArabī's opening remarks develop the Qur'ānic ethical theme of God's mercy into a metaphysical one:

Know that God's mercy encompasses everything in terms of existence and determination. ... Through this mercy with which He [God] was merciful to it [a thing's essence] He accepted its desire for its essence's existence, and thus brought it into existence.⁷

This intertwining of ethics and metaphysics is articulated in stronger language revealing the extent to which traditional ethical themes are subsidiary to ontology:

Everything mentioned by mercy is felicitous and everything is mentioned by mercy. Mercy's mentioning of something is the same as its bringing it into existence. Every existent thing is mercy-full (*marḥūm*). Do not be veiled, oh friend [of God], from perceiving what we have said by what you see of those who are misfortunate and by what you believe of the pains of the next life which do not abate for those who are beset with them. ... Everything mentioned by mercy is merciful (*raḥīma*). The active noun is 'the compassionate' (*al-raḥīm*) and 'the merciful' (*al-rāḥim*).⁸

⁵ Rahman, F, *Islam*, 2nd edn (London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp.144-5, states that 'in place of the moral, non-metaphysical mystic experience of orthodox Sufism, an out-and-out philosophical intuitionism was now substituted whereby men claimed to arrive at metaphysical knowledge. The classic formulation of the new Šūfī epistemology was worked out by Ibn al-ʿArabī.'

⁶ Nettler, 'Ibn ʿArabī's Conception', p.214.

⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. by AA ʿAfīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1980), I, 177.

⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 178.

Ibn ʿArabī also raises the theme of names and attributes in connection with mercy. He is principally concerned with the ways in which these are related to beings and things that are defined by them:

So, ‘someone who knows’ (ʿālim) is an essence (*dhāt*) having knowledge (ʿilm) as an attribute. It (ʿālim) is not the same as the essence nor the same as the attribute. There is only knowledge and essence in which this knowledge has inhered. Its being ‘someone who knows’ is a mode (*ḥāl*) of this essence in its having this sense (*al-maʿnā*) as an attribute. The relation (*nisba*) of knowledge to it takes place and it is called ‘someone who knows’.⁹

Ibn ʿArabī applies this theory to God:

He [God] is the merciful (*al-rāḥim*). The merciful is only merciful through mercy’s inhering in Him. So it is certain that He is the same as mercy.¹⁰

Ibn ʿArabī’s thesis points at an identity between God and creation. If God is mercy, and therefore existence, and if everything mentioned by mercy is brought into existence and is also merciful, then both God and creation are mercy. God is all and all are God.

Al-Nābulusī

Ibn ʿArabī calls this chapter ‘the Wisdom of Divine Sovereignty (*ḥikma mālikiyya*) in the Word of Zakariyyā.’ Al-Nābulusī provides an explication of this title, summarising the main themes of the chapter as a whole. These themes are metaphysical, rather than ethical as might be conventionally expected.

Al-Nābulusī states that the word for ‘divine sovereignty’ is derived from a divine name:

⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 179.

The chapter of the wisdom of divine sovereignty (*mālikiyya*) - that is to say pertaining to the Sovereign God (*al-mālik*) may He be praised.¹¹

Al-Nābulusī states that the wisdom associated with Zakariyyā is distinguished by being sovereign because it encompasses the mentioning (or remembrance) of general and specific divine mercy.¹² He therefore differentiates between general and specific divine mercy.¹³ For al-Nābulusī the wisdom of divine sovereignty refers to God's dominion as manifested in His mercy. He has linked mercy and power. Furthermore, he has linked the divine name 'the sovereign' to the divine attribute 'mercy.'

Al-Nābulusī strengthens his contention that the sovereignty referred to in the title is linked to mercy with a doubly relevant Qur'ānic quotation:

The mentioning [or remembrance] of the mercy of your Lord for His servant Zakariyyā [Qur'ān 19:2].¹⁴

Al-Nābulusī cites the fact that Zakariyyā has been linked to the mercy of his Lord in the Qur'ān. He has already hinted at a transformation of the Qur'ānic concept of mercy in the notion of the two types of mercy - general and specific. The

¹⁰ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 179.

¹¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

¹² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

¹³ This hints at the transformation of the Qur'ānic concept of mercy to a notion of two distinct, yet related types of mercy. Nettler, 'Ibn 'Arabī's Conception', p.215, notes that Ibn 'Arabī's universalist conception of God's mercy is drawn from a Qur'ānic context which is a mix of mercy's universal application with a more restrictive notion. For al-Nābulusī, although he does not give specific definitions of these terms, the evidence of his text, as will be shown, suggests that his concept of general mercy is an existence-bestowing mercy whereas specific mercy is mercy determining things to be what they actually are.

¹⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

importance of the term ‘mentioning’ will become clear later in this chapter when its existential function is discussed.¹⁵ Al-Nābulusī uses the ambiguity of the language of this Qur’ānic citation, which can be read in at least two different ways.

Conventionally, it is read as ‘(this) is an account of your Lord’s mercy to His servant Zakariyyā.’ However, there is the possibility, recognised by al-Nābulusī, that it can be read as ‘Your Lord’s mercy’s mentioning of His servant Zakariyyā.’¹⁶

Strengthening the links between the concepts of mercy and sovereignty, al-Nābulusī states that mercy possesses ‘sovereignty’ or ‘power’ (*mulk*) over those who are objects of this mercy:

Mercy has sovereignty over those who are recipients of it in [mercy’s] existence-giving nature and in [its] supporting nature.¹⁷

This establishes a particular relationship between mercy and its recipients. These objects are subject to mercy’s power and thus dependent upon mercy. Furthermore, al-Nābulusī mentions that nothing else has the unfettered control (*taṣarruf*) that mercy exhibits over its recipients. It alone has power over everything and it alone also possesses everything.¹⁸

¹⁵ Earlier, in the chapter on Ibrāhīm, it was noted that creation was originally not ‘mentioned’, and then God ‘mentioned’ it, thus bringing it into existence. There was clearly a link in metaphysical terms between the concepts of ‘mentioning’ and ‘existentiating’. This is developed further in the present chapter.

¹⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 220. Al-Nābulusī follows Ibn ‘Arabī in stating that mercy’s mentioning of all things - whether sensory, intelligible or imaginary - is the same as mercy’s bringing them into existence.

¹⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

¹⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

Al-Nābulusī is inclining away from a Qur'ānic mercy, which is personal and pietistic, to that of a metaphysical mercy. Those who are objects of this mercy are its objects with regard to existentiation (*ījād*) and support (*imdād*). In this he is following Ibn 'Arabī.

This transformation of language and concepts reveals another level of al-Nābulusī's understanding of the Qur'ānic stories of Zakariyyā and God's mercy: divine mercy has power over the essences (*dhawāt*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*) of those who are recipients of mercy.¹⁹ In the light of the previous statement about existentiation and support, it appears that the divine mercy brings into existence and supports the essences and attributes of those subject to it. This is its power over them. Al-Nābulusī has moved away from talking about people, such as Zakariyyā, who might receive mercy from their God with regard to a personal petition. He is now discussing mercy's sovereign hold over the essences and attributes which receive it.

Mercy's possession of everything (*al-raḥma ... falahā ... al-istīlā' 'alā kull shay'*)²⁰ is reminiscent of terminology used in the chapter on Ibrāhīm:

[Ibrāhīm] finds that God is pervading him with respect to what he finds due to the perfection of the Merciful possession of the corporeal and spiritual world and not with respect to what He really is in relation to His Sublime Self.²¹

Mercy is connected to God's possession of the world. God's possession of the world is merciful, and, with the present context in mind, this is with respect to

¹⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

²⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

²¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 144-5.

existentiation and support. In the chapter on Ibrāhīm, ‘possession’ was also equivalent to ‘pervasion’ (*takhallul*). There were two aspects to that pervasion, one of which was that creation is only existent through God’s existence, which pervades the forms of creation.²²

God’s possession of the world is equivalent to mercy’s unfettered control over everything at the level of existence. Mercy is sovereign and so is God. There is a logic in al-Nābulusī’s statements leading to the conclusion that God is mercy, and that, at the level of existence, that is all that really matters:

Mercy has existential sovereignty over those who are recipients of mercy It [mercy] has sovereignty over and possession of everything.²³

The chapter on Ibrāhīm raised a number of issues pertinent to Zakariyyā. Al-Nābulusī refers to God’s possession of the spiritual and corporeal worlds as being merciful. This possession is also defined as being God’s dyeing all of creation, which is in itself non-existent, in His existence.²⁴ This establishes a coherence between the merciful act of possession and dyeing everything in existence. Mercy is linked to existence as well as to possession.

Furthermore, when dealing with Ibrāhīm, al-Nābulusī strives to establish that, although creation is existent through God’s existence, this does not mean that one or the other was incarnated in the other or united with it. The concepts of incarnation

²² Later in this chapter it shall be shown that the forms of creation are said to be the forms of the manifestations of the divine names.

²³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

²⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 157, in the commentary on Ibrāhīm, states: ‘Every being ... is without its own existence. Then the time for everything comes ... and it is dyed with the dye (*ṣibgha*) of the True Existence’; and p.158: ‘it is correct to assert the pouring forth of existence in one respect and it is not

and union are impossible in such a context, since what is non-existent cannot incarnate itself in or unite itself with what is existent or vice versa:

Incarnation (*al-ḥulūl*) and union (*al-ittiḥād*) are not conceived of by those who believe that God has the True Existence (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*) and that all the created things other than Him have no existence from themselves. On the contrary their existence is through Him. There is no other existent thing with Him in His rank. Although they are other than Him with regard to their forms (*ṣūwariḥā*) and their determinations (*maqāḍirihā*), they are the same as Him with regard to their existence (*wujūdiḥā*) and their immutability (*thubūtihā*). It is not thought that an existent thing (*mawjūd*) may inhere in a non-existent thing (*maʿdūm*) nor that it unites with it, nor that a non-existent thing (*maʿdūm*) may inhere in an existent thing (*mawjūd*) nor unite with it. Neither one mixes with the other.²⁵

Although it is impossible to conceive of an essentially non-existent creation incarnating itself in or uniting itself with an essentially existent God or vice versa, there is a hint of an existential identity between them.²⁶ The chapter on Zakariyyā develops the thesis of an identity or equivalence between God and His creation from different premises to those used in Ibrāhīm.

The Metaphysics of God's Mercy

With regard to Ibn ʿArabī, Ron Nettler argues that 'the metaphysics of God's mercy is formulated through a transformation of the idea of God's mercy found in the

correct [to assert this] in another respect. Since we assert the dyeing of non-existent possible things with existence, we also assert the dyeing of existence with the non-existent possible things.'

²⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 146.

²⁶ *Falsafa* and, to an extent, *Kalām* maintained the absolute transcendence and unity of God while preserving the distinction between essence and existence in all things other than God. Existence is identical with essence for God only. God is essentially and eternally existent (*qadīm*) whereas everything other than Him is essentially non-existent and therefore only temporal (*muḥdath*). God as creator bestows existence on essences which are in a state of non-existence. Inasmuch as this existence is identical with God's essence, these non-existent essences of creation share in both God's existence and essence. However, constant efforts are made to state the essential non-existence of creation and the essential existence of God. See Gardet, L, 'Allah', in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1960), I, 406-417 (pp.411 & 415); Arnaldez, R, 'Falsafa', in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1965), II, 769-775 (pp.771-2); Goodman, LE, *Avicenna* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.67, 70, 74, 76-7, 96; Goichon,

Qur'an.²⁷ That the opening words of the chapter on Zakariyyā are a paraphrase of a Qur'ānic statement on the subject of God's universal mercy is no surprise.²⁸ This is Qur'ān 7:156: 'My mercy encompasses everything.'

Al-Nābulusī does not allude to the original Qur'ānic citation from which Ibn 'Arabī's paraphrase is drawn. He does not make reference to the ethical implications of mercy in that original context. He launches straight into the technical vocabulary specific to metaphysical issues. In this manner, the ethical is integrally related to, as well as treated as subordinate to, the metaphysical.

Al-Nābulusī establishes that mercy is one of God's eternal attributes.²⁹ He explains what he understands by Ibn 'Arabī's statement that mercy encompasses everything in terms of '*wujūd*' and '*ḥukm*'.³⁰

AM, 'Ibn Sīnā', in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1971), III, 941-7; Frank, RM, 'Hāl', in *EI*² *Supplement* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), fascicules 5-6, 343-8 (p.346).

²⁷ Nettler, 'Ibn 'Arabī's Conception', p.214.

²⁸ Nettler, 'Ibn 'Arabī's Conception', p.215 notes that the universalist conception of God's mercy is drawn from a Qur'ānic context which is a mix of mercy's universal application with a more restrictive notion, making God's mercy available only to those who obey Him. He concludes that for Ibn 'Arabī the restrictive and conditioned giving of divine mercy is here irrelevant, though perhaps not untrue. However, the interest in the present analysis is what al-Nābulusī makes of Ibn 'Arabī's statements.

²⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

³⁰ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 177, simply states that mercy encompasses everything in terms of *wujūd* and *ḥukm*, but he does not actually clarify what they mean. He implies by associating them together that they indicate the same thing - the act and process of giving existence. Nettler, 'Ibn 'Arabī's Conception', pp.215-6, renders these terms into English as 'existence-giving nature' and 'ontological governance' respectively. Frank, RM, *Beings and their Attributes* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1978), p.27 states: 'The thing or "essence"/thing itself is given to our knowing as being in some state (*'alā ḥālīn, ṣifatin*) by which it is known and distinguished through particular characteristics (*aḥkām*).' Frank, 'Hāl', pp.345, 346 & 347 also refers to *ḥukm* (*aḥkām*) as characteristic(s) or attribute(s). Frank's understanding of *ḥukm* in the context of Mu'tazilī *Kalām* appears relevant. Nettler's phrase 'ontological governance' may signify the determination of the characteristics/attributes of a given thing whereas 'existence' signifies the giving of existence. For the rest of the chapter, I shall keep these terms in a transliterated form.

God's mercy ... encompasses every thing ... in terms of *wujūd* - that is, with respect to the existence of that thing through it [mercy] - and in terms of *ḥukm* - that is, with respect to the *ḥukm* of that thing as being either made an effect or made perfect, or being either a good or bad effect, or being in possession of goodness or evil, or being stripped of them [effects].³¹

That which is made perfect may refer to God's eternally pre-existent attributes and names, while that which is made into an effect is God's originated creation, which by its difference to God and His attributes cannot be perfect.

This signifies that mercy brings everything into existence, whether in the perfect realm of God or the imperfect realm of creation. God's realm is composed of His Essence, attributes, and names, whereas creation's realm consists of the essences of all created things.³² These created things are essentially non-existent and need God's existence in order to enter into a state of existence. God's Essence is one, but through the action of divine mercy it becomes internally plural through the existence of the divine attributes and names.³³ These eternal attributes and names are connected with the non-existent essences which need God's existence to become existent in the world of multiplicity:

Since every archetype (*ʿayn*), whether one of the archetypes of names (*al-ʿayān al-asmāʾiyya*), which are simply relations (*nisab*) and ranks (*rutab*) in the One Essence, or one of the archetypes of effect (*al-ʿayān al-athariyya*), which are the forms of the manifestations of those relations and ranks of the names, has an existence, it [each type of archetype] demands its conditioned existence (*wujūd al-muqayyad*) from the presence of God's absolute existence (*wujūd Allāh al-muṭlaq*) which sustains everything.³⁴

And,

³¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216-7.

³² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

³³ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 179-180, discusses the relationship between the Divine Essence and its attributes and names. Al-Nābulusī does this much earlier in his commentary, but in a more sophisticated manner. He stresses the relationship between God as Divine Essence, attributes and names and creation. In this he is significantly different from Ibn ʿArabī.

³⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

And so God's encompassing mercy is pervading all the originated beings (*al-akwān al-hāditha*) through the attribute of subsistence of everything (*al-qayyūmiyya 'alā kull shay'*). Nothing has any subsistence but through it [mercy]. [And mercy is pervading] all the essences even the Divine Essence with respect to its appearance in the eternal archetypes of names (*a'yān al-asmā'*) and [mercy is pervading] the archetypes (*al-a'yān*) too, that is to say the archetypes of those essences which are their names, whether they are eternally pre-existent (*qadīmā*) or originated (*hāditha*).³⁵

On one level, the above quotations reveal a fundamental difference between what is God and what is creation in al-Nābulusī's thought - God and His attributes and names are eternally pre-existent whereas creation is originated. However, there is an ambiguity in al-Nābulusī's thought between the difference between God and His creation and the all encompassing nature of God's existence or mercy - equivalent to the Divine Essence - which touches everything. This issue is less apparent in Ibn 'Arabī's text.

Al-Nābulusī explains what it means for every thing to be encompassed by God's mercy, drawing on a number of Qur'ānic citations for support.³⁶ He states:

God's mercy ... encompasses everything, be it eternally pre-existent (*qadīm*) or originated (*hādith*).³⁷

Everything is divided into two classes: the eternally pre-existent (*qadīm*) and the originated (*hādith*). Al-Nābulusī has proposed that God determines everything to be either made perfect or to be made an effect, which, in turn, is divided into a number

³⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 220.

³⁶ Qur'ān 17:110, 4:126, and 20:5.

³⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

of sub-species. It is difficult not to equate, tentatively, eternally pre-existent with being made perfect and originated with being made an effect.³⁸

Al-Nābulusī's first reference to what is eternally pre-existent (*qadīm*) comes immediately after Ibn ʿArabī's initial statement that God's mercy encompasses every thing.³⁹ Al-Nābulusī gives a description of what it means for mercy to encompass all things:

Its [mercy's] encompassing of the eternally pre-existent is its [mercy's] being characterised by it [the eternally pre-existent]. Thus, it [mercy] is attributed with all the divine attributes. Consequently, it [mercy] is encompassing all that. The name [that is derived] from it [mercy] is gathering together all the names. So, it [the name] is encompassing them [all the names]. God said, 'Say: call upon God or call upon the Merciful One. Whichever you call, that possesses the beautiful names' [Qur'ān 17:110].⁴⁰

Mercy, through its existential and determinative encompassment of the eternally pre-existent, is associated with all the divine attributes.⁴¹ They are all

³⁸ Department of Theology, *A Commentary of Theology Expression* (Mashhad: Islamic Research Foundation, 1995), pp.267-8, covers the development and use of the term *qadīm*. A common definition is that it refers to that the existence of which is necessarily existent and which is not preceded by anything else at all, whether existent or non-existent. It is said that the Muʿtazila used it to refer to God and nothing else. The Ashʿarites used it to refer to God and His attributes. The philosophers used it to refer to God and the world in its entirety and also to that the existence of which is not connected to anything else. Furthermore, the *mutakallimūn* referred to that which is *ḥādith* as being something the existence of which has a beginning and which is preceded by non-existence. That which is *qadīm* is its opposite. On pp.111-2, this same work follows the development and use of the term *ḥādith*. The definitions are consistent. These are that this term refers to something that was non-existent and then became existent or something that was not and then was. Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. by RA Nicholson (Leiden: Brill, 1911), p.386 states that *qadīm* is being anterior in existence, that is to say, something always was, and its being was anterior to all beings. This is nothing but God. Frank, 'Ḥāl', p.346 states that God is *qadīm* or eternal and that everything else is temporally existent or *muḥdath*. Al-Nābulusī is stating here that God's mercy encompasses God and His attributes as well as creation. God and His attributes are perfect in their being *qadīm*, while creation is imperfect in its being *ḥādith*.

³⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 177.

⁴⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

⁴¹ Like Ibn ʿArabī, al-Nābulusī stresses the paramouncy of mercy over all other attributes of God. This simple idea emerges out of early Sufism's stress on the love and mercy of God. See the second half of this chapter. However, out of the simple idea of God's overriding love and mercy for creation comes the complex interplay of metaphysical and ethical concepts of mercy, existence and creation.

attributed to mercy.⁴² The divine name ‘the Merciful’ (*al-rahīmān*) holds an identical rank with respect to all the other divine names. All these divine names denote ‘the Merciful.’ Furthermore, the name ‘the Merciful’ is on a par with the name ‘Allāh.’ It appears that the eternally pre-existent consists of the Divine Essence, attributes, and names.

Al-Nābulusī strengthens this argument with two versions of a *ḥadīth* concerning God’s division of mercy into one hundred parts. God kept ninety-nine of these with Him and let one part descend to earth where creation is merciful owing to this piece of mercy:

Abū Huraira relates on the authority of the Prophet that he said that God made mercy into one hundred parts. He kept for Himself ninety-nine parts and let one part descend to earth. And so with that [one part of mercy] creation is merciful to itself so that even the mare raises its hoof from its foal for fear that it might trample it. Al-Ḥasan’s account is that God has one hundred mercies, of which He let one descend to the inhabitants of earth. And so it encompassed them until the time of their death. God will return that mercy on the Day of Judgement to the ninety-nine. He will perfect them into one hundred mercies for His friends and for the people who obey Him.⁴³

Al-Nābulusī interprets this *ḥadīth*:

Mercy was divided into one hundred parts, which are the ninety-nine divine names and the one-hundredth part is the name of the essence which gathers them all together.⁴⁴

Every divine name is one part of mercy and so denotes that mercy. The pivotal and central function of mercy and of the name derived from it, ‘the Merciful,’ is stressed. Mercy encompasses the eternally pre-existent, thereby bringing it into

⁴² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217, when describing wrath’s relationship to mercy, he uses grammatical terminology to make his point that the attribute of wrath is attributed to mercy. See the next discussion concerning the *ḥadīth* on the hundred parts of mercy.

⁴³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217. Variations of this *ḥadīth* can be found in al-Bukhārī 8:29 (related by Abū Huraira), Muslim 6631 (related by Abū Huraira), and Muslim 6632 (related by Salmān al-Fārisī).

⁴⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

existence and determining it. In doing this, mercy is itself attributed with all the divine attributes and the name derived from it is denoted by all the other divine names. Al-Nābulusī is more explicit when explaining the relationship of wrath to mercy. He uses grammatical terms:

Wrath comes after it [mercy] in the way that the attribute comes after the noun which has an attribute, and [also] in the way that the noun comes after what is denoted.⁴⁵

From al-Nābulusī's use of Qur'ān 17:110 and from his statements about the relationship between mercy and the other divine attributes, a dominant theme emerges. Mercy is an attribute indicated by all the other attributes and that the name derived from it, 'the Merciful,' is indicated by all the other names. All these other attributes and names depend on mercy for their existence and determination.⁴⁶ Thus, whereas on the ethical plane, the attribute of wrath is the polar opposite of mercy, on this metaphysical plane, wrath is dependent on mercy for its existence and determination.⁴⁷

Mercy is the existential and determinative principle of God's divine attributes and of the ninety-nine divine names. This mercy has unfettered sovereign control over and possession of everything that it encompasses. All the other attributes and names denote this sovereign by their being subject to it. Al-Nābulusī quotes Qur'ān 20:5

⁴⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

⁴⁶ It has to be acknowledged that Ibn 'Arabī is also arguing that all the other attributes and names of God depend on mercy for their existence and determination. Nettler, 'Ibn 'Arabi's Conception', p.225 states that 'in the same manner as God's mercy in its metaphysical mode is absolute being, so too are all the other divine names and attributes absolute being in their reduction to the one divine essence which is coterminous with mercy.' Al-Nābulusī agrees with this, but attempts to highlight the differences between God as essence and God as attributes from the perspective of mankind, which is the only perspective that appears to really matter. Equally, al-Nābulusī stresses the differences between the Divine Essence, attributes and names and the realm of creation.

⁴⁷ This is an interesting development from the early Sufi position that God's mercy was paramount. For the early Sufis, mercy was the opposite of wrath, but they held that God was inclined to be more merciful than wrathful. However, for both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī, God's wrath is dependent on

which develops this sovereign image of mercy: ‘The Merciful One upon the throne has sat down.’⁴⁸

Alluding to Qur’ān 20:5, he states:

His [God’s] mercy, with which He is sitting down upon the throne, has preceded all His attributes and names.⁴⁹

Only the concept of the Divine Essence precedes all the divine attributes and names. The logic of al-Nābulusī’s statements leads to the conclusion that the Divine Essence and mercy share metaphysical functions.⁵⁰ He has stated that the divine name ‘the Merciful’ gathers together and encompasses all the other divine names. He has also cited Qur’ān 17:110 which suggests that both the divine name ‘Allāh’ and the name ‘the Merciful’ possess all the other divine names. He takes this further:

Mercy has taken the place of the Essence, which gathers [all] together, for the divine attributes and names.⁵¹

The Essence gathers all together and the name ‘the Merciful’ also gathers together all the other divine names. Al-Nābulusī establishes a functional correspondence, or even identification, between the Essence or God and the attribute of mercy:

He [God] is the merciful one (*al-rāḥim*), that is to say He is characterised by mercy (*al-raḥma*); the merciful one is only merciful through the inherence (*qiyām*) of the attribute of mercy in him So, it

His mercy. Thus, even God’s wrath is an aspect of His mercy! See the second half of this chapter for a discussion of pre-Ibn ‘Arabī Sufism.

⁴⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

⁴⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

⁵⁰ Nettler, ‘Ibn ‘Arabī’s Conception’, p.219 states that Ibn ‘Arabī made the Sufi universalisation of God’s mercy synonymous with existence and thereby with God Himself.

⁵¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

is affirmed in accordance with His being merciful that He [God] is the same as the encompassing mercy.⁵²

This is consistent with the metaphorical imagery with which he has described the attribute of mercy. This imagery is used in the Qur'ān to describe God in His most powerful and sovereign aspects. Al-Nābulusī is supporting his views with Qur'ānic citations.

It is possible to visualise a hierarchy where there is mercy on the throne above all else. This mercy brings everything else, whether eternally pre-existent (perfected) or originated (made an effect), into existence. Al-Nābulusī is arguing that mercy is functionally equivalent to the Divine Essence. He states, on the basis of Qur'ān 17:110, that the divine name 'the Merciful' (*raḥmān*) is equivalent to the divine name 'Allāh'. All the other divine names denote either of these names. He also argues that the 'effects' of these divine names are their 'forms' which are manifested as creation. In this manner, there is a kind of emanational hierarchy flooding from the fount of mercy, which provides the hierarchy's existence and ontological determination. This metaphor of emanation blurs the boundaries between what is apparently eternally pre-existent or perfected and what is apparently originated and effected, that is to say imperfect.⁵³

⁵² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 224.

⁵³ See the chapter on Hārūn, where al-Nābulusī understands Ibn 'Arabī's idea that God is seen to appear as everything else as indicating that God *as existence* is the same as everything else. God and creation are said to be one on the level of existence only. It is implied that God and creation are essentially different. God's essence is utterly one and unknown. God's attributes and names are known to creation. These are the nexus between God and creation. The forms of creation are the manifestations of these names and attributes. See also the chapter on Ibrāhīm which examines the relationship between man's knowledge and the Divine Essence.

In the chapter on Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī argued:

We are the ones who through our possibility have differentiated His Essence's *ijmāl* and have distinguished between His Essence, attributes, names, deeds and *aḥkām* so that we have manifested through our non-existent possible realities and essences His divinity and lordship.⁵⁴

This was a statement professing that it was the originated creation that made God known or differentiated. This entailed the differentiation of the sublime unknown Essence into the various ranks or 'planes of being' (*al-ḥaḍarāt*) which constitute God's divinity. From His Essence came His attributes, from His attributes came His names, and from His names came His determinations (*aḥkāmuh*).⁵⁵ This suggests that there is a link between the names of God and His determinations which is the same as the link between His names and His effects. This supports the contention that an emanational metaphor is being employed by al-Nābulusī. This metaphor is strengthening the theme of the blurring of distinctions between God and His creation.⁵⁶

Al-Nābulusī makes a direct correspondence between God's mercy and its relationship with the divine attributes and names and God's Essence and its relationship with its modes (*aḥwāl*).⁵⁷ The Essence and mercy are both in a

⁵⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 149. See the footnote above concerning *ḥukm/aḥkām*.

⁵⁵ The term *ḥukm/aḥkām* used in the present context appears to indicate the classifying of everything other than the Essence or God into what is made perfect or what is made an effect, that is to say, establishing their characteristics. See the footnote above concerning this term.

⁵⁶ This is an example of the ambiguity in al-Nābulusī's writings between his attempt to establish strong distinctions between God and creation and the implications in his writing of the blurring of these distinctions.

⁵⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217. Department of Theology, *A Commentary*, p.113, covers the development and use of the term *ḥāl*. It states consistently that this term indicates an attribute (*ṣifa*), which is neither existent nor non-existent, of an existent thing. Another definition of it is that it is a medium between what is existent and what is non-existent. Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, p.223, follows Ibn ʿArabī in saying that 'the modes associated with the divine names are neither existent nor non-existent in themselves or in other things ... because they are relations (*nisab*) of the Absolute True

relationship of priority with things that characterise them and denote them. These are either attributes and names or modes.⁵⁸ This establishes a positional correspondence between the Essence and mercy. The earlier functional correspondence is supported by this. Al-Nābulusī is not stating that there is an identity between these two concepts, but his statements are developing a strong theme of correspondence that appears to indicate an aspect of equivalence.

Ibn ʿArabī describes mercy's relationship to wrath:

The existence of wrath is from the mercy of God for wrath. So, His [God's] mercy precedes His wrath, that is to say, the relation of mercy to Him precedes that of wrath to Him.⁵⁹

This introduces a new dimension. According to Ibn ʿArabī, the attributes of God all have relations (*nisab*) to God. Some of these have precedence over others.

Mercy logically precedes all others, since it brings them all into existence and

Existence.' Wolfson, HA, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge and London: HUP, 1976), pp.167, 172-4, 180, 204, 216-7 also discusses modes (*aḥwāl*). He states that Abu'l-Hudhayl in the 9th century argued that terms predicated of God were aspects of the essence and that these aspects were the same as Abū Hāshim's modes (*aḥwāl*) in the 10th century. Abū Hāshim developed a theory of modes and applied it to the problem of the divine attributes. These modes were said to be neither existent nor non-existent and neither cognisable nor incognisable. Although, Ashʿarī, as an orthodox attributist, was anti-modes, a modalist Ashʿarite trend emerged. This became a moderate orthodox view, which held that it was possible for men to believe in modes and universal concepts which are neither existent nor non-existent, neither known nor not known, neither created nor uncreated, neither beginningless nor originated, and neither real nor unreal. This moderate orthodox view that modes were attributes had thus developed out of a moderate Muʿtazilite view. Indeed, Ibn Khaldun believed that belief in modes was a common characteristic of *Kalām*. See also, Frank, 'Hāl', pp.343, 345, 347, & 347; Gardet, 'Allāh', p.411; and Frank, *Beings*, pp.19, 23, & 26.

⁵⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 223, states that there are modes related to the divine names, 'which are relations (*nisab*) of that absolute true existence (God). They are also matters inhering in the mind of those that think about them, but they have no extra sense, although they may have an extra sense in the mind of those that think about them. Thus, Jāmī said in his *Risāla*, "The Sufis believe that God's attributes are the same as His essence according to existence, yet other than it according to the mind.'" Clearly these *nisab* are the same as modes and attributes. Al-Nābulusī adds on p.224 that philosophers (*ḥukamāʾ al-falsafa*) hold that the attributes are the same as the essence in the sense that there is not an essence and attributes, rather a single essence. If God is powerful with the essence, then the essence is the same as what is called power, but there is no rank (*rutba*) there nor any relation (*nisba*) at all. Al-Nābulusī states that in terms of reason and revelation this view is false.

determines them. Ibn ʿArabī suggests that every archetype or essence (*ʿayn*) demands an existence from God and so God’s mercy encompasses every archetype.⁶⁰ It follows that the attributes, such as wrath and mercy as well as everything else, have archetypes. It is these that demand existence and God brings them all into existence through His mercy.

These relations seem to indicate something different for al-Nābulusī. He has stated that wrath’s relation to God comes after mercy’s. ‘Relation’ (*nisba*) seems to indicate attribute or mode for him.⁶¹ He has already argued that through its existential and determinative encompassment of the eternally pre-existent, mercy is associated with all the other divine attributes.⁶² They are all attributed to mercy. The implication of this is that mercy is a ‘substantive’ qualified by an attribute and that wrath is that attribute:

Wrath comes after it [mercy] as the attribute (*al-ṣifa*) comes after the noun having an attribute (*al-mawṣūf*) and [as] the noun (*al-ism*) comes after the meaning (*al-musammā*).⁶³

This is a different point to that made by Ibn ʿArabī, who appears to be saying that mercy’s relation to God comes before wrath’s. Al-Nābulusī is arguing that all the divine attributes are associated with God through divine mercy. He suggests that these ‘relations’ are not just connections between attributes or their archetypes and God:

Since every archetype, whether one of the archetypes of names, which are simply relations (*nisab*) and ranks (*rutab*) in the unitary essence, or one of the archetypes of effect, which are the forms of the manifestations of those relations and ranks of the names, has an existence.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 177.

⁶⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 177.

⁶¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 223.

⁶² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

⁶³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

⁶⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

The names of God are archetypes which are relations and ranks in the unitary Essence of God. God is one, but with internal relations and ranks which are the archetypes of His names. These names are in turn derived from His attributes which also indicate His unitary Essence. These divine names, now viewed as internal relations and ranks, are eternally pre-existent. Al-Nābulusī has also argued that these relations are the same as attributes and modes. Thus, God's names are the modes or attributes in the unitary Divine Essence.⁶⁵

These divine names, viewed as relations, throw light on the discussion of mercy's relation to God vis-à-vis wrath's relation. Both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī agree that mercy's relation to God precedes wrath's relation. If that relation (*nisba*) is defined as the divine name derived from a given attribute, then that signifies that the divine name 'the Merciful' precedes the divine name 'the Wrathful'. When this is seen in the context of mercy being the substantive denoted by the attribute 'wrath', this emphasises the dependency of all divine names and attributes on 'the merciful one' and on 'mercy.' Not only do mercy and the merciful one come before all else, everything else, except for God and the Divine Essence, follow and depend on mercy and the merciful one.

Al-Nābulusī states:

⁶⁵ Wolfson, *The Philosophy*, pp.173-4, shows that Abū Hāshim proposed that all the various modes predicated of God stemmed from one single mode and that God's essence has a mode necessarily causing another. Clearly, both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī are proposing that God's essence has a mode/attribute called mercy which causes all the other modes/attributes to exist. However, they suggest that God's essence is His mercy. For further information concerning modes/states, see: Frank, 'Hāl', pp.343-348; Frank, *Beings*, pp.19, 23, & 26; & Gardet, 'Allāh', p.411.

The archetypes of effect (*al-a'yān al-athariyya*) ... are the forms of the manifestations of those relations and ranks of the names (*al-nisab wa'l-rutab al-asmā'iyya*).⁶⁶

This provides a key link to the realm of the originated creation (*al-hādith*).

This also supports the emanational system of appearance from or within the unitary essence. There is the One Essence or mercy at the head of a hierarchy. Within this are the archetypes of the divine names. These demand their existence. The Essence or mercy gives them their existence and these archetypes appear as divine names. These names appear in forms through the archetypes of the effects, which, in turn, demand their own existence. This is granted to them by mercy which encompasses and existentiates them through those names. These effects are originated and constitute creation.⁶⁷ Mercy also determines them to be effects, by which they are made to be imperfect in contrast to the perfection of the divine names. These effects are thereby related to relative dichotomous values such as good and evil.⁶⁸

All forms in the phenomenal temporal world are connected essentially with the divine names in the eternal and perfect world of the Divine Essence.⁶⁹ Al-Nābulusī supports this with the *ḥadīth* concerning mercy being divided into one hundred parts:

⁶⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

⁶⁷ The chapter on Ibrāhīm examines al-Nābulusī's understanding of God's pervasion of Ibrāhīm on the level of existence. God nourishes Ibrāhīm with existence, thereby bringing him into existence. On the other hand, Ibrāhīm nourishes God with knowledge, thereby making God known as God.

⁶⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

⁶⁹ Nettler, 'Ibn 'Arabī's Conception', pp.223-5, argues that if, for Ibn 'Arabī, God is mercy and mercy, redefined as absolute existence, is all creation, then creation is identified with God. Furthermore, Ibn 'Arabī acknowledges the notion that all the divine names indicate one essence. It is mercy which represents, subsumes and absorbs all the other attributes, just as all being, including God, is reduced to mercy. Thus, all the divine names and attributes are reduced to the one Divine Essence which is the same as mercy. He also hints at the fact that the names of God are all modally inhering in creation, thus establishing a nexus between creation and the one Divine Essence through the universal application of mercy.

It was recounted that mercy was divided into one hundred parts, which are the ninety-nine divine names and the one-hundredth part is the name of the Essence that gathers them all together, and that the one part of them [the 100 parts] was in the world. This was the name which gathers [them all together] and is of the Essence and is appearing in every thing.⁷⁰

And in the chapter on Muḥammad al-Nābulusī states:

[The world] is the effects of His different beautiful names which are His form. So, all the meanings (*musammayāt*) of those names have appeared in the world.⁷¹

Not only are the divine names reflected in the world of originated things through their forms which are the archetypes of effects, but the Divine Essence itself or the main part of mercy is also present in every thing in the world. This statement highlights the blurring of the boundaries between the eternally pre-existent and the originated, or between God and His creation. This blurring is undeniable, yet al-Nābulusī maintains distinctions such as the fact that the originated effects of the names are forms which nothing eternally pre-existent can actually be:

There is no doubt that the eternally pre-existent divine names (*al-asmā' al-qadīma*) are of the totality of things because they are simply relations (*nisab*), regards (*i'tibārāt*) and additions (*iḍāfāt*) between God's Essence and the archetypes of being (*al-a'yān al-kawniyya*), which are immutable in their original non-existence, that He has originated before their existence. If those immutable archetypes acquire the attribute of existence from those essential relations, the addition is from the Divine Essence through those relations. Those above-mentioned relations appear not to be originated (*tuhdath*) because they are eternally pre-existent (*qadīma*) with the eternal pre-existence (*qidam*) of the Divine Essence since they are relations, regards and additions of the Essence.⁷²

And in the chapter on Muḥammad he states:

God in [His] Essence, that is to say with respect to His being without a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*), which is one of the effects (*āthār*) of His names, in which to manifest Himself to His gnostic servants, is in no need of the worlds and so has no appearance from this essential aspect.⁷³

⁷⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

⁷¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 326.

⁷² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217-8.

⁷³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 317.

The Essence, its attributes and divine names are all eternally pre-existent (*qadīm*). They are without form. They are all brought into existence and determined through mercy which is the same as the Divine Essence. Everything, including the Divine Essence, is existent through mercy. Thus al-Nābulusī amplifies Ibn ‘Arabī’s remarks:

God is the Merciful one (*al-rāḥīm*), that is to say characterised with mercy. The Merciful one is only merciful through the inherence of the attribute of mercy in Him so that if He is merciful with it to something else, He makes it appear in that thing. Thus, He is merciful with mercy to mercy. It was stated earlier that the first thing to receive mercy was mercy. So, it is confirmed by the necessity of God’s being merciful that He is the same as mercy which encompasses everything.⁷⁴

The logic of this statement is that whatever receives mercy, whether the Divine Essence or the divine attributes and names, becomes, on one level, the same as mercy. For al-Nābulusī, Qur’ān 17:110 is the support for proposing that mercy is characterised by all the divine attributes and that the divine names are gathered together by the divine name ‘the Merciful.’ Inasmuch as mercy has encompassed and thereby brought them into existence, they have all received mercy and as such are mercy. Furthermore, al-Nābulusī states:

A single essence, which is the Divine Essence and Absolute Existence, which permeates without permeation all the attributes associated with names and being. This essence is the same as everything.⁷⁵

The attributes and names appear to be the Essence, since the Essence is mercy and they have received that mercy.

⁷⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 224.

⁷⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

Through the logic of the emanational system, all the effects or forms of the divine names, or created originated things, all indicate mercy and thereby are mercy. Furthermore, it is not a huge leap from this position to argue that created things also indicate the Divine Essence and therefore ‘are’ the Divine Essence. Al-Nābulusī does argue that the One, Essential part of mercy is in this originated world.

However, in no way can it be argued that al-Nābulusī’s position is that the Divine Essence has a form which is either sensory, intelligible, or imaginary.⁷⁶ These are characteristics of the ‘formed’ (*muṣawwar*) originated things of creation. Al-Nābulusī explains what it means for God’s mercy to encompass the originated:

Its [mercy’s] encompassment of the originated, whether it be sensory, intelligible, or imaginary, is because it [mercy] has the encompassment of all archetypes. As God said, ‘And God is all things encompassing’ [Qur’ān 4:126]. [Encompassing (*muḥīṭ*)] the thing is encompassing (*wāsi‘*) it. God only encompasses through the attribute of mercy which is sitting on the throne, which is gathering together every thing through the name which is derived from it [mercy]. This is the name ‘the Merciful.’ All the names follow it [the name ‘the Merciful’] in accordance with the previous verse [Qur’ān 17:110]. God said, ‘The Merciful upon the throne is sitting’ [Qur’ān 20:5]. Every name encompasses its effect through mercy from which it has turned. Thus, mercy is the thing that is encompassing (*al-muḥīṭa*), and so it is the thing that is encompassing (*al-wāsi‘a*) everything.⁷⁷

Al-Nābulusī’s point is that God’s mercy encompasses the originated because the Qur’ān states that God encompasses everything. This implies that God’s mercy is identical with God.⁷⁸ Two Arabic words for ‘encompassing’ are used. Al-Nābulusī

⁷⁶ In the chapter on Ibrāhīm, in the context of a discussion on the reciprocity of nourishment, al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 158-9, states, ‘we can also state that there is the dyeing of existence with non-existent possible things And the non-existent possible thing’s being food for existence is sound too because it [existence] is ‘formed’ (*muṣawwar*) and shaped (*mushakkal*) by them. And so it has appeared in forms and shapes to the senses and the intellect. But it is in itself pure existence utterly transcendent from that.’

⁷⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

⁷⁸ It was noted above that al-Nābulusī establishes a functional correspondence, or even identification, between the Divine Essence and the divine attribute of mercy.

equates them to provide coherence between the various Qur'ānic citations and within his own writings. God's mercy encompasses (*wasī'at*) everything (Qur'ān 7:156) and God is encompassing (*muḥīṭ*) everything (Qur'ān 4:126). For al-Nābulusī these verbs denote the same action.

Mercy encompasses everything: all archetypes (*al-yān*). There are two types of archetypes - those related to the divine names and those related to the effects of those names. These effects are the originated things of creation. These effects are forms which are either sensory, intelligible, or imaginary. Mercy encompasses them all, bringing them all into existence, and determining them all to be effects, whether good or bad. The existence that is imparted to the names and effects is absolute and sustains them both:

Every archetype [those related to names and those related to effects] demands a conditioned existence from the 'plane' (*ḥaḍra*) of God's absolute existence which sustains everything.⁷⁹

The names are sustained through mercy's being characterised by them and the effects are sustained through mercy's causing an effect.⁸⁰

If mercy or the Divine Essence is characterised by all the divine names which it brings into existence, then that same mercy may also be characterised by the effects of those names which it also brings into existence, but through those names. It may be inferred that mercy's being characterised by the eternally pre-existent names does not infringe mercy's own pre-existent state. Mercy is equivalent to the Essence and its relationship to the names is the same as the Essence's to the divine names. The names are internal relations and ranks in the One Essence and are also parts of mercy.

⁷⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

However, mercy is also characterised by the originated effects, which are the forms of the manifestations of the eternally pre-existent names. This seems to blur the distinction between the eternally pre-existent and the originated, either elevating the originated to the status of the eternally pre-existent, or relegating the eternally pre-existent to the status of the originated.

Al-Nābulusī is suggesting the inclusion of the eternally pre-existent in the world of the originated. Reference has already been made to the *ḥadīth* that he uses to explain the ninety-nine names being derived from mercy, thereby suggesting that they are mercy and yet different from it. The hundredth part was said to be the Divine Essence which gathers all the other names together. This one part is in the world. It is through this one part that the originated world of the archetypes of being or effect are brought into existence. However, in the same way that the divine names are mercy by virtue of their being brought into existence by it, likewise, the originated world is also mercy.

Al-Nābulusī uses this *ḥadīth* to refer to the ethical dimensions of mercy. This one part of mercy, the part signifying the Divine Essence, is not just in the world as an existentiating force. It is through this mercy that the world of originated things is able to be merciful:

It [100th part of mercy] was the name which gathers [them all together] and is of the Essence and is appearing in every thing, by which name the beast raises its hoof from its offspring out of compassion and mercy for it lest it trample it.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

⁸¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

At one level, this can be interpreted to be another dimension of the metaphysical argument concerning the concept of mercy, where mercy is the connecting link between all the rungs in the existential ladder of 'reality.' It must be stressed though that al-Nābulusī does emphasise both the existential oneness of the Divine Essence and its utter difference from anything known by creation.

There is also the level at which one can interpret the *ḥadīth* about mercy in ethical terms. Al-Nābulusī recognises this, but comments on it ambiguously. Whereas the hundredth part of mercy, the essential part, is manifested in everything, the ninety-nine other parts, the divine names, are only differentiated on the Day of Resurrection.⁸² Just the mere reference to the Day of Resurrection in the context of a discussion of mercy, is indicative of ethical issues. He states:

And so God will be merciful with them [the ninety-nine parts of mercy] to His servants. The scale will be built on justice and no soul shall be dealt with unjustly at all owing to the appearance of divine justice on that Day.⁸³ And the gnostics shall be transformed by all the parts [of mercy].⁸⁴

This statement combines ethical with metaphysical themes: both justice and mercy are stressed. Although His servants are to be judged, God will be merciful to them. It is uncertain whether this mercy is ethical or metaphysical, or both. Furthermore, the mystics will be pervaded and transformed by the totality of the one hundred parts of mercy which are all the divine names, thus becoming mercy, and possibly the Divine Essence, in the next life.

⁸² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

⁸³ This is an allusion to Qur'ān 21:47.

⁸⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

The Ethical Implications of Divine Metaphysical Mercy

Like Ibn ʿArabī, al-Nābulusī transforms a personal and pietistic story about Zakariyyā into a metaphysical one. However, al-Nābulusī refers to the ethical more than Ibn ʿArabī. In order to appreciate al-Nābulusī's and Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of mercy - whether seen as ethical, metaphysical, or both - more fully, a brief survey of pre-Ibn ʿArabī Sufism and Islam will provide a useful context.

Islam, when viewed from a purely Qur'ānic perspective, is certainly, from one point of view, an essentially ethical religion. Man's existence in this world (*al-dunyā*) is to be appreciated as a preparation, or a test, for life in the next (*al-ākhirah*). Man's existence rests on the pivot of the Day of Judgement, whose importance in the Qur'ān is unassailable. Fazlur Rahman argues:

Chronologically, the first belief that the Qur'ān inculcated after monotheism and socio-economic justice was that of judgment or final accountability. ... There must, therefore, be a moral reckoning where dire punishment awaits the non-believers and the evildoers while immense recompense will be bestowed on the righteous.⁸⁵

W. Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell agree with Rahman:

After the doctrine that God is one the doctrine of the Last Judgement may be reckoned the second great doctrine of the Qur'ān. In essentials this is the doctrine that on the Last Day men will be raised to life and will appear before God to be judged and to be assigned to Paradise or Hell according as their deeds are mainly good or mainly bad.⁸⁶

Daud Rahbar stresses that the meaning of the Qur'ān to the Prophet and the people around him, within their historical context was that of God's strict justice of the

⁸⁵ Rahman, *Islam*, p.15.

⁸⁶ Watt, WM & Bell, R, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p.158.

Judgement Day. He argues therefore that this was the dominant note of the Qur'ān's doctrine of Allah:

The idea of God as the Essence, which characterises the anti-anthropomorphic theology of Islam, has obscured the dominant note of the Qur'ān, the idea of God's justice.⁸⁷

Toshihiko Izutsu has elaborated his understanding of Islamic ethics as described in the Qur'ān in two invaluable works.⁸⁸ He argues that Islam is essentially ethical and that the ethical relationship between man and God is grounded in two basic concepts: absolute trust in God and pious fear of God.⁸⁹ Furthermore, he states that the ethico-religious system of the Qur'ān is based on the conception of eschatology:

The structure of the ethics of the present world is determined by the ultimate (eschatological) and to which the present world (*al-dunyā*) is destined.⁹⁰

Pre-Ibn 'Arabī Sufism

In the 8th and 9th centuries mysticism flowered among Muslims.⁹¹ This evolved from earlier ascetic tendencies which had been a reaction to the secularisation, materialism and dissensions of Umayyad times.⁹² The early Mystics were characterised by retired lives, voluntary poverty and their meditation on the Qur'ān and names of

⁸⁷ Rahbar, D, *God of Justice - A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), p.XIII.

⁸⁸ Izutsu, T, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966) and *God and Man in the Koran - Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964).

⁸⁹ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious*, pp.vii & 17-8.

⁹⁰ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious*, p.108.

⁹¹ Hodgson, MGS, *The Venture of Islam - Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*, 3 vols (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), I, p.394.

⁹² Massignon, L, [Radtke, B] 'Taṣawwuf - 1. Early Development in the Arabic and Persian Lands', in *IE²* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), x, 313-317 (p.313); Smith, M, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1931), pp.154, 157, 167.

God in order to draw near to God.⁹³ Early Sufism developed out of the spirit of Qur'ānic piety that had flowed into the lives and modes of expression of the early devotees and ascetics. Their aim was to attain ethical perception and, as such, J. Spencer Trimingham states that:

Early Sufism was a natural expression of personal religion in relation to the expression of religion as a communal matter.⁹⁴

Annemarie Schimmel, who admits that little is known of the earliest ascetic tendencies in Islam, examines the poetry of a number of early mystics and states that such writings show not only variety of expression but an increasing profundity of thought as the mystical experience is refined.⁹⁵

Ron Nettler echoes this when he states that, 'the God-Man relationship was understood by most *sufis* in more personal and pietistic terms. Mercy, God's most prominent characteristic for them, was the gift of a loving God to His beloved creatures. The depth of mystical experience often both confirmed and made possible this truth.'⁹⁶

The mystics of the 9th century strove to procure a coherent foundation of their theory and practice.⁹⁷ Sufism attempted to follow the lines of Orthodox Islam in its emphasis on devotion to the religious practices of Islam with the addition of various

⁹³ Massignon, L, 'Taṣawwuf', in *EI* (Leiden: Brill, 1934), IV, 681-5 (pp.682-3); Hodgson, *The Venture*, I, p.395.

⁹⁴ Trimingham, JS, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York & Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.2

⁹⁵ Schimmel, A, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p.33.

⁹⁶ Nettler, 'Ibn ʿArabi's Conception', p.218.

⁹⁷ Massignon, L, [Radtke, B] 'Taṣawwuf', p.314.

works of supererogation.⁹⁸ Moderate Sufism was never ‘excommunicated’ by Sunni Islam.⁹⁹

In the 9th century Sufis entered upon a course of conflict with ordinary believers and provoked the learned in society with claims to be a chosen elite.¹⁰⁰ In effect, some Sufis fell into conflict with the Sharī‘a.¹⁰¹ From the ninth century onwards Sufis were to suffer denunciations, charges of heresy or accusations of unbelief.¹⁰² However, some of these cases were not between Sufis and their non-Sufi opponents: some were an intra-Sufi affair which involved the authorities of the day in their quarrels.¹⁰³

Ibn ‘Arabī

Izutsu, in his *tour de force* on Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, describes what Ibn ‘Arabī had done to the ordinary understanding of mercy:

In the ordinary understanding *rahmah* [mercy] denotes an essentially emotive attitude, the attitude of compassion, kindly forbearance, pity, benevolence, etc. But for Ibn ‘Arabī, *rahmah* is rather an ontological fact. For him, *rahmah* is primarily the act of making things exist, giving existence to them. It is bestowal of existence, with, of course, an overtone of a subjective, emotive attitude on the part of the one who does so.¹⁰⁴

Nettler argues that Ibn ‘Arabī disrupted conventional doctrinal stipulations with regard to the centrality of divine mercy further than what had preceded with a shift to the metaphysical realm:

⁹⁸ Smith, *Studies*, p.169.

⁹⁹ Massignon, ‘Taṣawwuf’, pp.682-3.

¹⁰⁰ Böwering, G. ‘Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy’, in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, ed. by De Jong, F & Radtke, B (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp.45-67 (p.54); Smith, *Studies*, pp.157-8.

¹⁰¹ Hodgson, *The Venture*, 1, p.401.

¹⁰² Böwering, ‘Early Sufism’, p.54.

¹⁰³ Böwering, ‘Early Sufism’, p.54; Smith, *Studies*, pp.157-8.

¹⁰⁴ Izutsu, T, *Sufism and Taoism - A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (London: University of California Press, 1984), p.116.

The usual sufi universalisation of God's mercy was extended beyond the realm of the individual and personal, becoming synonymous with existence itself and, thereby, in Ibn 'Arabī's terms, with God, Himself.¹⁰⁵

Both Izutsu and Nettler agree that Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of mercy gives a particular colouring to the interpretation of the ethical nature of God. For Izutsu, Ibn 'Arabī's concept of mercy signifies that beings obtain their existence by the Essence of the Absolute manifesting itself in accordance with the capacity determined in eternity for each thing. This encapsulates the two aspects of mercy: a universal mercy synonymous with existence which is a gratuitous gift from God; and a more human mercy which is exercised with 'discrimination'. Such 'discrimination' is in accordance with what each person actually has done, or ontologically, in accordance with the 'preparedness' of each individual being.¹⁰⁶

For Nettler, there is also a twofold nature of God's mercy - the personal (conventional) and the metaphysical. He suggests that there is a total intertwining of the traditional ethical and Ibn 'Arabī's *sufi* metaphysical outlooks. The focal point for these outlooks is the Qur'ānic term mercy, which in its metaphysical transformation resonates with traditional meanings. However, heaven and hell are made 'equal,' both in a more conventional sense, with a usual *sufi* notion of God's universal (personal) mercy, as well as with Ibn 'Arabī's great shift in mercy's ontological meaning.¹⁰⁷

The Metaphysics of Mercy and Wrath according to al-Nābulusī

¹⁰⁵ Nettler, 'Ibn 'Arabī's Conception', p.219.

¹⁰⁶ Izutsu, *Sufism*, pp.121 & 129.

¹⁰⁷ Nettler, 'Ibn 'Arabī's Conception', pp.220 & 222.

Ibn ʿArabī does not ignore the ethical, yet stresses the metaphysical transformation of mercy. Al-Nābulusī mirrors this. However, the ethical implications are much more pronounced in his commentary than in Ibn ʿArabī's original. This is apparent from various *ḥadīths* that he adduces and from the comments that he makes. Nevertheless, that al-Nābulusī constantly stresses the ontological dimension of mercy is never in doubt:

God's mercy encompasses every eternally pre-existent and originated thing ... with respect to the existence of that thing through it [mercy] and with respect to the determination of that thing in its being effected (*mu'aththar*) or perfected (*mukammal*), or a good or bad effect, or possessing goodness or badness, or being stripped of all that.¹⁰⁸

The determinative force (*ḥukm*) of mercy may also have an ethical as well as an ontological aspect. That which is not perfect is imperfect, and the imperfect is determined to be relative to a certain range of dichotomous values, for example good and evil. What seems to be stressed here is less the ethics of goodness and evil, and more the ontology of goodness and evil.

Likewise, in the same manner as Ibn ʿArabī, al-Nābulusī discusses the ethical concept of divine wrath in ontological terms:

Mercy's relation to Him with regard to the bringing of everything into existence ... from those divine names and lordly attributes precedes the relation of wrath to Him.¹⁰⁹

Wrath is said to be existentially dependent on mercy, even though it is one of the Divine Essence's attributes. There is no discussion of how wrath might be in a dichotomous, ethical relationship with mercy. It seems that, al-Nābulusī, like Ibn

¹⁰⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216-7.

‘Arabī, is stating that all of God’s names, including the ethical ones, are to be viewed from an ontological perspective.

The realm of traditional ethics is transcended. Mercy stands above what is pleasurable and what is painful in order to bring both into existence and to determine what is good and what is evil in creation. The divine mercy of the Day of Judgement is lost in a new concept of mercy which brings into existence and determines what is to be good and evil. Mercy is no longer equivalent to what is good in contrast to wrath which is evil. Ethics is now subordinate to ontology - ontological mercy touches everything whether good or evil. Heaven and hell are not in dispute. They are both touched by mercy, but neither is the sole preserve of mercy.

Al-Nābulusī’s text does not address the ethical dimensions of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīths*, rather it by-passes them, even if their content has, from an ordinary perspective, strong ethical overtones.

The Mercy of Felicity and Torment

Despite the transcendence of traditional ethics, both al-Nābulusī and Ibn ‘Arabī keep using ethically laden terms. An especially ethical term is that for felicity (*sa‘āda*). This is a term normally reserved for those who enter heaven as opposed to wretchedness (*shaqāwa*) which is for those doomed to hell. Al-Nābulusī completely transforms this concept. Ibn ‘Arabī indicates that every thing mentioned by mercy is

¹⁰⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

felicitous, which appears to mean existent.¹¹⁰ For him, felicity is existence. This holds equally true for al-Nābulusī, however he qualifies this felicity:

Every thing mentioned by that divine encompassing mercy is felicitous in this world and the next. That is to say, its reward is felicity which is eternal without end. There is nothing in existence save what has been mentioned by that mercy. Mercy's mentioning of all imaginary, intellectual and sensory things is the same as its bringing them into existence.¹¹¹

Al-Nābulusī refers to universal existential mercy in this citation. The effect of this mercy on all things is not just to bring them into existence. It engenders their eternal felicity in this world and the next. This felicity seems to denote that all things will be eternally in existence both in this world and the next. Felicity, although still echoing its original ethical significance, has been transformed as much as mercy. It no longer signifies a reward for those who have earned God's favour through following the strictures of His Law, rather it now signifies the universal existence that God bestows on all things.

Both Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī are at pains to establish that ethics is not the issue in this discussion. Al-Nābulusī elaborates Ibn ʿArabī's statements to the effect that one should not be put off the ontological truths under discussion by the sight of those who are suffering psychological and physical torment in this world or by the belief in the infinite and everlasting torments of the next world. He explains that the torments of this world and the next do not prevent the acquisition of eternal felicity by all those who are encompassed by mercy.¹¹² Since there is nothing in existence that is

¹¹⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 178.

¹¹¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 220.

¹¹² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 221.

not touched by mercy, it follows that everything in existence is guaranteed an eternal felicity. This is not the felicity of ‘convention’.

The Acquisition of General Mercy and Felicity

Like Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Nābulusī elaborates the theme of two types of mercy - whether denoted by terms such as ‘essential,’ ‘gratitude,’ or ‘asking,’ ‘obligation’ - which are attained in two different ways. In his preface to the commentary on this chapter, he stated that mercy was sovereign because it encompasses the mentioning (or remembrance) of general and specific divine mercy.¹¹³ That act of ‘mentioning’ is equivalent to the act of bringing things into existence. The general mercy is equivalent to the essential mercy attained through Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of the ‘way of gratitude.’

The essence of every thing has a pre- and post-existent state. When in a pre-existent state, the essence of a thing is immutable or permanent. Mercy’s existential effect on this essence is ineffective at this point, although God still knows that thing’s essence. The thing’s essence needs existence and so God mentions it, thereby bringing it into existence through His existence. Like Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Nābulusī stresses that all things are brought into existence in this general way by and through God’s mercy. There is no question of an aim or no aim, or appropriateness or no appropriateness entering this formula of existention.¹¹⁴

This theory of general mercy is restated at the end of the chapter where it is discussed by both Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Nābulusī in terms of God’s divine gratitude (*imtinān*) or grace (*faḍl*) and munificence (*karam*). Being divine grace, this gift of

¹¹³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 216.

¹¹⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 221.

existence is not associated with any act at all. This echoes the above statement that neither an aim nor a lack of aim, and so on, is associated with the existential powers of mercy. Furthermore, this type of mercy, attained in this general way, is associated with Qur'ān 7:156:

The other way of attaining this divine mercy is the way of divine gratitude, that is to say grace and munificence, ... which is God's statement, 'And My mercy encompasses every thing' [Qur'ān 7:156], that is to say as a blessing, grace, and munificence, which (mercy) is the favour of bringing every thing into existence.¹¹⁵

It is clear from al-Nābulusī's comment on Ibn 'Arabī's citation of various Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīths* at the end of the chapter that this mercy is general and existential in nature. That these ethical verses are being transformed by the newly shaped concept of general existential mercy is also evident. In these verses and *ḥadīths* mercy is associated with forgiveness, and both terms seem equivalent to existention. Furthermore, al-Nābulusī explains that each citation refers to different people. The first citation refers to the Prophet, the second to the Islamic Umma, the third to gnostics, and the fourth to the people of Badr.

Al-Nābulusī states that God's mercy for His Prophet in Qur'ān 48:2 is an example of the way of gratitude: 'So that God might forgive you all your sins - those in the past and in the future.'¹¹⁶

He states that God's mercy for everybody else in the Islamic Umma in Qur'ān 4:48 or 4:116 is also an example of the way of gratitude: 'And He forgives everything else for those He wants.'¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 227.

For al-Nābulusī, Qur'ān 39:53 refers to God's mercy for His special servants which they attain through the way of gratitude. These servants are said to be related to God through turning away from everything else and through their seeking refuge in Him through annihilation from every thing:

Say: 'My servants who have gone too far with regard to themselves - do not despair of the mercy of God. God will forgive all sins. He is the Most Forgiving and the Most Merciful.'¹¹⁸

And finally there is the *ḥadīth* concerning the people of Badr: 'Do what you want, I have forgiven you.'¹¹⁹

Al-Nābulusī proposes that each of these citations refers to God's mercy for different elements of His creation through the way of gratitude. This way of gratitude is that all things receive the grace of existence. Each of these citations stresses the mercy of God's forgiveness. Forgiveness has the same force as God's existential mercy. It is also transformed from a fundamentally ethical sense to a metaphysical one. Forgiveness, felicity and mercy all refer to God's general and existential mercy for all things.

The Acquisition of Specific Mercy

Specific mercy, like general mercy, was mentioned in al-Nābulusī's preface to this chapter. Specific mercy may be viewed as a 'species' of general mercy; it belongs to the larger family of general mercy, and in this way these concepts are related to each other.

¹¹⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 227.

¹¹⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 227-8.

¹¹⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 228.

¹¹⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 228.

The essence of every non-existent thing needs existence. In the first half of this chapter it was remarked that the archetypes related to names and to effects both demand an existence, which is appropriate to their specific appearance, from God's absolute existence which sustains everything.¹²⁰ Al-Nābulusī, in an allusion to Qur'ān 7:156 and amplifying Ibn 'Arabī's text, states that specific mercy is what God wrote for those who believe and those who are God fearing.¹²¹

Al-Nābulusī's discussion of this specific mercy is ontological in nature. He follows Ibn 'Arabī in stating that there are two types of people who ask for God's mercy. They are those who are veiled from the gnostic knowledge of God and those who possess this knowledge.¹²² It seems that both types of person are included in the description of those for whom God has written His mercy - those who believe and those who are fearful of God.

Those who are veiled from gnostic knowledge are constrained by narrow views of God. These views are not wrong, rather they are just incomplete. What they know is true, but not the wholesome truth of the gnostics. The faculties of their psyche impede their appreciation of God's mercy:

Those who are veiled from the gnostic knowledge of God ask, petition and demand God to be merciful to them with this specific mercy in the state of that God's being in the [doctrine of] belief, that is to say they are formulating Him through their imagination that He is God, but He is the God created in belief [only].¹²³

The veiled believers ask a specific manifestation of God to be merciful to them. That this mercy is probably ethical in nature is clear from the fact that it is the God of

¹²⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

¹²¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 222.

¹²² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 222.

conventional beliefs that is petitioned. This is clearly not wrong, but it is not the complete and sophisticated picture of the real dynamics of the situation which al-Nābulusī and Ibn ʿArabī are trying to impart.

On the other hand, the gnostics, for whom God also wrote His mercy, also ask God to be merciful to them. However, this is really a request for the all-encompassing mercy to appear in them. This petition for specific mercy seems to be identical with what general mercy does. Furthermore, the difference between them and those who are veiled is that the gnostics know the dynamics of the reality of mercy, whereas those who are veiled do not appreciate that reality for what it is. Ultimately, the effect of the petitions of both types of person is the same:

They [the gnostics] know that nothing is merciful to them save the appearance of divine mercy in them, just as it appears in the presences of the names and in the essential ranks of the attributes.¹²⁴

Whereas those who are veiled cannot appreciate this, the gnostics can do so only through *dhawq*. *Dhawq* is said to be the process of unveiling and witnessing rather than imagination and understanding.¹²⁵

Ethics is not really addressed in this discussion. With another allusion to Qurʾān 7:156, al-Nābulusī finishes the initial discussion of specific mercy by confirming that general mercy becomes specific mercy when it has appeared in His creation:

And so that general mercy has become specific to them, which is what God said, ‘And so I shall write it [mercy] for those who fear [God],’ after stating that, ‘And My mercy encompasses every thing.’¹²⁶

¹²³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 222.

¹²⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 222.

¹²⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 222.

¹²⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 222.

The theory of specific mercy, like that of general mercy, is restated at the end of the chapter where it is discussed by both Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī in terms of God making this mercy obligatory for Himself. Ibn ʿArabī quotes the second half of Qurʾān 7:156 to support this: ‘I shall write it [mercy] for those who fear [God].’¹²⁷ Al-Nābulusī adds Qurʾān 6:54: ‘Your Lord has written for Himself mercy.’¹²⁸

Unlike general mercy, specific mercy is linked to acts on the part of those who receive it:

And so I [God] shall write mercy for those who guard themselves from both manifest and hidden association of others with God [*shirk*]. Unbelief [*kufr*] is the result of manifest *shirk*, whereas sins are the result of hidden *shirk*. [And I (God) shall write mercy for those who] perform almsgiving with two and a half percent of their wealth and with the annihilation of the ego of their souls.¹²⁹

Al-Nābulusī and Ibn ʿArabī also add that God has also obligated these people through the revealed Law to act and think in certain ways.¹³⁰ Al-Nābulusī uses the examples given by the verses he has cited - godliness or piety (*taqwā*) and almsgiving (*zakāt*). He has used examples of protecting oneself from all forms of *shirk*, of giving up a legally prescribed proportion of one’s wealth, and of the mystically sanctioned attempt to annihilate one’s ego. If one is able to do these things, one will be rewarded with specific mercy.

However, whereas one can protect oneself from all *shirk* and can give a percentage of one’s wealth to charity, it is not as easy to annihilate the ego. This is

¹²⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 180.

¹²⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 227.

¹²⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 227.

¹³⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 227; Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 180.

something normally found in the Sufi context of traversing the path to God.¹³¹ It must be re-stated that al-Nābulusī has argued that both those who are veiled and those who are not will be recipients of divine mercy. They, like everything else in creation, exist through divine mercy's appearing in them. This metaphysical reality is not in accordance with God's having obligated Himself with being merciful to those who perform certain acts. Despite this, if this theory is viewed through the prism of al-Nābulusī's hierarchy of faith in and knowledge of God, it can be argued that these acts do not necessarily dictate whether one receives mercy or not, rather whether one appreciates that specific mercy as being the same as general mercy or not.¹³²

It has been argued that the ethics of the Qur'ān are not addressed by al-Nābulusī even if the content of his citations has, from a conventional perspective, ethical overtones. However, the *ḥadīth* which al-Nābulusī cited in the earlier context of the metaphysical transformation of mercy is of great value in appreciating the differences between general and specific mercy. That *ḥadīth* was:

Abū Huraira relates on the authority of the Prophet that he said that God made mercy into one hundred parts. He kept for Himself ninety-nine parts and let one part descend to earth. And so with that [one part of mercy] creation is merciful to itself so that even the mare raises its hoof from its foal for fear that it might trample it. Al-Ḥasan's account is that God has one hundred mercies, of which He let one descend to the inhabitants of earth. And so it encompassed them until the time of their death. God will return that mercy on the Day of Judgement to the ninety-nine. He will perfect them as one hundred mercies for His friends and for the people who obey Him.¹³³

Contained in the first account of this *ḥadīth* is the concrete image of a mare and its foal. This image has strong ethical connotations: the mare shows kindness to her

¹³¹ See the chapter on Ibrāhīm for al-Nābulusī's views on 'annihilation'.

¹³² See the chapter on al-Nābulusī's introduction to the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

foal for fear it be hurt by its hoof. From this image of animals, the *ḥadīth* moves to an image of the Day of Judgement. This latter image has obvious ethical implications. However, al-Nābulusī entangles ethical implications with those of metaphysics.

Mercy is divided into one hundred pieces. Ninety-nine of these are the divine names. The hundredth piece is the Divine Essence. Mercy is the same as the divine names and the Divine Essence. From the moment of creation until the Day of Judgement, the Divine Essence, as represented by the hundredth piece of mercy, shall be on earth, by whose power creation is merciful to itself. The ninety-nine divine names remain with God. On the Day of Judgement, those divine names will be differentiated from each other and it is with them that God shall be merciful to His servants. Furthermore, it is with all one hundred pieces of mercy that the gnostics shall be transformed on that Day.¹³⁴

It is unclear whether God's being merciful to His servants - those who are unveiled and those who are gnostics - is metaphysical in the sense of giving them existence or ethical in the sense of judging them for their actions. Ethics and metaphysics are entangled.

Al-Nābulusī alludes to Qur'ān 21:47 which stresses ethics, justice and eschatology. These concepts have been transformed by the new use of mercy, which gives them a metaphysical as well as an ethical dimension. It is unclear whether these dimensions are equal in weight or whether one is heavier than the other.

¹³³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

¹³⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

The *ḥadīth* states that gnostics will be transformed by all the parts of mercy on the Day of Judgement. This would include the hundredth piece of mercy which is identical with the Divine Essence. This is in contrast with the ordinary servants with whom God will be merciful on that Day with the ninety-nine divine names which are to be differentiated from each other. For all classes of person, ethics and metaphysics are entangled.

Al-Nābulusī continues by stating that the one piece of mercy, which God lets descend to earth, possesses the name of the Divine Essence, which gathers together all the other pieces of mercy.¹³⁵ The one piece of mercy which is equivalent to the Divine Essence and which is in this world performs an important function in establishing two categories of people.

One category of people is made up of those who are aware of or realise the one piece of mercy in this world.¹³⁶ This one piece is the same as the Divine Essence. Those that have this awareness will not miss the rest of the ninety-nine pieces of mercy which represent the divine names on the Day of Resurrection or in the next world. These people will also be aware of or realise the rest of the ninety-nine pieces of mercy.¹³⁷ This one piece of mercy or the Divine Essence is pivotal. It is the one-hundredth piece of mercy because it is the same as the Divine Essence:

And this piece which is in this world is what is intended in everything because it is the same as the Essence.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

¹³⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 218.

¹³⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 218.

¹³⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 218.

Al-Nābulusī stated earlier that the gnostics would be transformed by all the pieces of mercy on the Day of Judgement. It follows that the first category of people alluded to here are these gnostics. That they are aware of the Divine Essence or the essential piece of mercy in this world is what leads to their perfection and qualification by all the things qualifying God Himself.

The other category of people is made up of those who are not aware of or do not realise the one part of mercy or the Divine Essence in this world.¹³⁹ They will miss the rest of the ninety-nine pieces of mercy which represent the divine names on the Day of Resurrection or in the next world. These people will not be aware of or realise the rest of the ninety-nine pieces of mercy.¹⁴⁰

Al-Nābulusī states that whereas the one piece of mercy was in this world, the rest of the pieces of mercy would be differentiated from each other on the Day of Judgement.¹⁴¹ God is to be merciful to His servants with these pieces of mercy on that Day. Al-Nābulusī alluded to Qur'ān 21:47 to support this point. These pieces of mercy represent the ninety-nine divine names. It is doubtful whether these servants are the people of the second category since if they are not aware of the Divine Essence or the hundredth piece of mercy in this world, they will not be aware of the divine names or the rest of the pieces of mercy in the next world. It is only God's friends, those who obey him or the gnostics who will be aware of these names. This implies that they all will have been aware of the Divine Essence in this world. There are ethical and metaphysical implications of this theory.

¹³⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 218.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 218.

¹⁴¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 217.

Al-Nābulusī proceeds to a discussion of heedlessness (*ghafla*), which is a metaphysical and ethical danger. Having explained that there are two types of people in this world - those aware of the Divine Essence and those who are not - and what that means for the next life, he states:

Thus, heedlessness on the part of those who are ignorant of this piece [of mercy] has become numerous in this world. Heedlessness is the same as being awake to it [the piece of mercy], and to its being an indivisible piece, and to the fact that gnostic knowledge is the same as it, while wanting that knowledge to be different to it - which is impossible rationally and legally. They are not aware because they are aware of too much. If they were aware of less, they would become aware of the reality of this Powerful One [piece of mercy, which is the same as the Divine Essence].¹⁴²

In terms of the two categories of people elaborated above, the gnostics who are aware of the Divine Essence have clearly recognised the truth that the gnostic knowledge of a thing is the same as the known thing and that they have to remove the distractions of this world in order to contemplate the Divine Essence. This Divine Essence is close to them after all - it is in this world, within them and without. This awareness will entitle them to be transformed or qualified by the ninety-nine divine names in the next world. Those who are not gnostics are both ignorant and heedless of the Divine Essence in this world. Their ignorance and heedlessness will prevent their being transformed or qualified by the divine names in the next world.

Conclusion

Al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn ʿArabī in the fundamental ideas of his text. However al-Nābulusī introduces new elements and sophisticated interpretations that are not obviously present in Ibn ʿArabī's original. For example, that al-Nābulusī

¹⁴² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 218. See the chapter on Ibrāhīm where aspects of Sufi epistemology as understood by al-Nābulusī are addressed.

agrees with Ibn ʿArabī that mercy has an existential function is apparent. However, al-Nābulusī presents the paradigm of planes of existence in exploring the ramifications of mercy's existential function: the eternally pre-existent Divine Essence comprises a host of perfect eternally pre-existent attributes which are internal relations in that Unitary Divine Essence. These attributes are the same as the Essence and enable the Essence to be known by various names. The forms of these names are manifested in the world of creation, whose existence is provided by the Divine Essence.

The Divine Essence is absolute existence. When this absolute existence is 'given' to the non-existent archetypes of creation it becomes conditioned existence.¹⁴³ Unlike Ibn ʿArabī, who hints at an existential identity between God and creation through the existential role of mercy, al-Nābulusī is more nuanced and cautious with respect to his belief in this identity. This caution is not as apparent in Ibn ʿArabī's text. There is a tension in his thought between an identity and a difference between God and creation.

For Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī the issue of ethics is subordinate to that of ontology and metaphysics. However, it is striking that al-Nābulusī presents more specifically ethical images and themes than Ibn ʿArabī in explicating the metaphysical functions of Divine Mercy. He discusses the obligations of the religious law with regard to polytheism, godliness and charity. However, he compares the religiously sanctioned acts related to godliness and charity with the Sufi ideals of the annihilation of the ego. He suggests that those Sufis who are aware of the metaphysical truths in

this world will be rewarded in the next unlike those who are ignorant or heedless of these truths.

Finally, al-Nābulusī is creative in his use of various scriptural themes and images that are not present in Ibn ʿArabī's text. He cites the *ḥadīth* concerning the one hundred parts of mercy as well as certain Qur'ānic verses concerning mercy. His interpretation of these verses displays a bold and free-thinking spirit willing to impose its own ideas on Ibn ʿArabī's text.

¹⁴³ Note that this is reminiscent of ideas in the chapter on Ibrāhīm in which God is said to need creation in order to be known whereas creation needs God in order to be existent.

CHAPTER 6

Hār ūn

Introduction

Ibn ʿArabī's chapter on Hārūn in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, like that on Ibrāhīm, exhibits some of Ibn ʿArabī's most explicitly controversial writing. From an exegesis of the Qur'ānic accounts of the worship of the golden calf, he argues that God commanded that only He is to be worshipped and that, therefore, everything that is worshipped is in fact, in one sense, God or a manifestation of God:

Mūsā had a better knowledge of the matter than Hārūn because he knew what the followers of the calf were worshipping. [This was] due to his knowledge that God commanded that nothing should be worshipped except Him and that God does not order a thing except that it happens. ... The gnostic is he who sees God in every thing, rather he sees Him as the same as everything. ... And each perfect gnostic is he who sees every object of worship as a manifestation of God in which He is worshipped.¹

The theme of God appearing in or as everything occurs later in the chapter, where Ibn ʿArabī states:

He has commanded that nothing be worshipped save Himself in many different ranks each of which has produced a divine manifestation in which they are worshipped.²

¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. by AA ʿAfīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1980) I, 192 & 195. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Furqān Bayn al-Haqq wa'l-Bāṭil*, ed. by K al-Mais (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.), pp.155-6, where he criticises strongly this passage of Ibn ʿArabī on Hārūn, Mūsā, and the worship of the Golden Calf.

² Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 192.

The passages above elucidate the theme of the One God appearing in and as the world of multiplicity. Al-Nābulusī recognises this and in so doing reveals the proximity of his position to that of Ibn ʿArabī. He states that:

The wisdom associated with Hārūn comprises the clarification of the appearance of the One Essence in many forms.³

Ibn ʿArabī begins the chapter with an explanation of his understanding of the relationship and differences between Hārūn and Mūsā. This precedes his account of Mūsā's reproaching Hārūn for allowing the worship of the golden calf while he was absent from his people, which is based on the two main Qur'ānic accounts of this episode in the history of the Israelites: Qur'ān 7:148-154 and 20:83-98.

The account found in the seventh chapter of the Qur'ān describes how the Israelites made the calf an object of worship while Mūsā was absent. It states that this was wrong and that they realised this eventually, repenting in the hope of receiving God's mercy and forgiveness. When Mūsā returns he is angry with his people. He seizes Hārūn roughly, but Hārūn pleads in the name of their mother that their people ignored him and almost killed him. He suggests that the worship of the calf was not his fault. Mūsā asks God for forgiveness and mercy for himself and his brother. This Qur'ānic account states that those who worship the calf are to suffer the wrath of God

³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, 2 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1304-1323), II, 254.

and shame in this life. It also emphasises that those who do wrong but repent afterwards and truly believe, are to receive the mercy and forgiveness of God.

The account of the worship of the calf found in Qur'ān 20 begins with a description of Mūsā's meeting with God after he had left Hārūn in charge of their people. God tells him that he has tested his people in his absence and that they have been led astray by al-Sāmirī. Mūsā returns to his people in a state of anger, reproaching them for having ignored God's promise to them and having broken the promise they made to him. Mūsā's people blame al-Sāmirī for the creation of the calf. However, they believe that the calf was the same as the God of Mūsā. This Qur'ānic account acknowledges that this calf had no powers of good or harm over them. It is no god.

Hārūn, while Mūsā was still absent, pleaded with his people to follow him for he saw that they were being tested by God. They decided to worship the calf until Mūsā returned. When Mūsā returns he scolds Hārūn for not stopping the worship of the calf. He accuses Hārūn of disobeying him. Hārūn implores Mūsā not to seize him and mistreat him for he fears that Mūsā will believe that he established the worship of the calf. Mūsā listens to him and turns to al-Sāmirī. Al-Sāmirī explains that he fashioned the calf from the jewellery brought out of Egypt and the dust from the angel Gabriel's footprints.⁴ Mūsā exiles al-Sāmirī and condemns him to everlasting shame in

⁴ This is a reference to 'the handful' of dust in Qur'ān 20:96. Al-Sāmirī comments that he saw things that the Israelites did not and that he was inspired to pick up a handful of dust from the messenger's (either Jibrā'īl or Mūsā) footprints and put it into the molten metal that was being fashioned into the

this life and torment in the next. He destroys the calf and states that his people's God is one and omniscient.

It is this worship of the golden calf and Mūsā's and Hārūn's response to it which form the basis of Ibn 'Arabī's chapter and which lead to the issue of the One Essence appearing in many forms.

The One and the Many

The discussion of the relationship between the One and the Many emerges from the discussion of the Qur'ānic stories of Mūsā, Hārūn, and the worship of the golden calf.⁵ It is while Mūsā is away that the worship of the golden calf takes place among the Israelites. Hārūn is their leader in the absence of Mūsā. When he returns to his people, a number of whom, whether large or small, are publicly worshipping the idol of the golden calf, Mūsā is irate. God has just given him the tablets, which, according to Qur'ān 7:145, ordained laws commanding and explaining all matters.

Hārūn, as leader in Mūsā's absence, was responsible for the aberration from the Law that took place. Both Qur'ān 7:150 and Qur'ān 20:92-4 describe how Mūsā begins to reproach Hārūn for what has occurred. Both Qur'ānic accounts portray the

calf. Ibn Kathīr understands this verse as indicating that al-Sāmirī saw Jibrā'īl riding a horse, which the Israelites did not see. Al-Sāmirī thus picked up some dust from the tracks of Jibrā'īl's horse. See Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, ed. by K. Al-Mais (Delhi: Maktabat Ishā'at al-Islām, 1985), pp.379-80. Al-Tha'labī supplies a large amount of extra-Qur'ānic material concerning al-Sāmirī and the dust from the tracks of Jibrā'īl's mare. This mare is said to be 'the mare of life' and that whatever it touched came alive. See al-Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā' - 'Arā'is al-Majālis* (Dār Ihyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīya, n.d.), p.184.

worship of the calf as idolatry and not as the correct form of monotheistic worship. It is this worship of the One God that Mūsā was sent to Pharaoh and the Israelites to preach. His own brother, his helper, deputy and fellow prophet, appears to have betrayed this divine message. Qur'ān 20:91-3 states:

They [the Israelites] said, 'we will not abandon this worship, we will devote ourselves to it until Mūsā returns to us.' Mūsā said, 'Hārūn, what stopped you, when you saw them erring, from following me? Did you disobey my order?'

Mūsā's order was that only the One God should be worshipped, not the false idols of the past, that 'oneness' should predominate over 'multiplicity'.

Both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī quote Qur'ān 20:94 and Qur'ān 7:150 which describe the moment when Hārūn anticipates Mūsā's public rebuke of him.⁶ These accounts do differ in detail, but both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī conflate them into one story.⁷ Mūsā throws aside the God-given tablets which explain all things.⁸ Mūsā humiliates Hārūn by seizing him by the head and beard, but before Mūsā rebukes him,

⁵ See also the section in the chapter on Muḥammad in this thesis concerning Muḥammad as creative principle where Muḥammad is the nexus between the oneness of God and the multiplicity of creation.

⁶ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 191-2. Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 254-5.

⁷ Qur'ān 20:94 indicates what Hārūn said to Mūsā when the latter accused him of disobeying him. Hārūn begs Mūsā not to seize him by the beard or head. He also states that he feared that Mūsā would accuse him of dividing the Israelites and not respecting his orders. Qur'ān 7:150 mentions that Mūsā returned to the Israelites both angry and sad. The Israelites had done evil. Mūsā puts down the tablets he had received from God and seizes Hārūn by the head and drags him closer. Hārūn pleads that the Israelites had behaved arrogantly towards him and almost killed him. He does not want Mūsā to give them reason to insult him further. Furthermore, he does not want Mūsā to consider him an evildoer.

⁸ Qur'ān 7:150.

Hārūn speaks.⁹ He pleads for Mūsā not to seize him thus for he feared that Mūsā would say that he was responsible for creating a schism among the Israelites.¹⁰ Furthermore, he states that the Israelites considered him weak and almost killed him.¹¹

Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī are in agreement that Hārūn, the leader of the Israelites in Mūsā's absence, is not an effective leader in implicit contrast to Mūsā. The Israelites do not follow his example. In fact, a certain number of them appear to reject Mūsā's and Hārūn's command to worship the One God. In place of this worship, they create the golden calf and worship this 'god'. By Mūsā's rigid standards, Hārūn appears to fail in his duty as leader since he did not impose his example upon the people.

Ibn ʿArabī's title for the chapter on Hārūn is 'the bezel of wisdom concerning leadership in the logos of Hārūn.'¹² Al-Nābulusī explains that this attribute of leadership is associated with Hārūn because 'he was his brother's, Mūsā's, deputy among his people, when he [Mūsā] went to his meeting with his Lord.'¹³ Al-Nābulusī cites Qur'ān 7:142 to support this:

And Mūsā said to his brother Hārūn, 'Be my deputy among my people and do right. Do not follow the path of the corrupt.'¹⁴

⁹ Qur'ān 7:150.

¹⁰ Qur'ān 20:94.

¹¹ Qur'ān 7:150.

¹² Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 191.

¹³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 254.

¹⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 254.

Having stopped Mūsā scolding him publicly, Hārūn explains that he forbade the worship of the calf, but the Israelites defied him:

Hārūn had said to them before, 'My people! You are being tested in this. Your Lord is the Most Merciful. So, follow me and obey my command' [Qur'ān 20:90].¹⁵

According to Qur'ān 20:90, Hārūn tried to enforce the strict law of monotheism and prevent the worship of the calf. Unfortunately, his powers of leadership were not effective, for elements of his people refused to listen to his advice and commands. Both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī, relying upon a combination of elements from both Qur'ān 7:150 and 20:94, agree that Hārūn feared that Mūsā would blame him for dividing the Israelites into different groups, for letting the worship of idols overcome monotheism, letting multiplicity overcome oneness. Ibn 'Arabī states that:

Hārūn said to Mūsā, 'I feared that you would say, "You have divided the Israelites,"¹⁶ and you would make me a cause of their being divided. But the worship of the calf divided them.' Some of them worshipped it, obeying and following al-Sāmirī.¹⁷ Others hesitated from worshipping it until Mūsā returned to them to ask him about it.¹⁸

Al-Nābulusī provides some extra-Qur'ānic information to add more detail to the two Qur'ānic accounts. He cites that:

It is said that those among the Israelites who were devoted to the worship of the calf were 8,000. It is said that all the Israelites worshipped it except for Hārūn and 12,000 men, which is more accurate. Al-Hasan says that they all worshipped it except Hārūn alone.¹⁹

¹⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 255.

¹⁶ Qur'ān 20:94.

¹⁷ Qur'ān 7:150 does not refer to al-Sāmirī, only Qur'ān 20:94 does so.

¹⁸ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 191-2.

¹⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 255-6. Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, pp.380-1, cites two accounts of the number of Israelites killed for the worship of the calf - 70,000 and 3,000. Al-Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-*

A situation emerged among the Israelites wherein the tension between monotheism and polytheism is established. A people who were once united in their worship of the One God are now divided into different groups distinguished by their objects of worship.

Mūsā does not rebuke his brother. He checks himself at the moment Hārūn speaks to him. Ibn ʿArabī states that if Mūsā had looked at the tablets he was carrying from his meeting with God, he would not have been precipitate in his desire to scold Hārūn.²⁰ Thus, Hārūn acted to stop Mūsā acting precipitately and erroneously. Ibn ʿArabī, alluding to Qurʾān 7:145, states that if Mūsā had examined the tablets carefully, he would have found in them guidance and mercy.²¹

Al-Nābulusī adds that ‘the guidance is the indication of the Truth from God Himself.’²² He also comments that the mercy is divine and is from Mūsā for his brother. Al-Nābulusī is in broad agreement with Ibn ʿArabī here. They both agree that the guidance was the indication that what occurred and what had incensed Mūsā was something of which Hārūn was innocent. Furthermore, they both agree that the mercy was from Mūsā for Hārūn. Al-Nābulusī cites two Qurʾānic quotations to support this:

Anbiyāʾ, p.185, states that there were 600,000 Israelites of whom only 12,000 did not worship the calf. He adds on page 187 that 70,000 were killed for the worship of the calf.

²⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 191.

²¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 191.

²² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 255.

And We have written laws for him in the tablets concerning all matters, both as an exhortation and a clarification of all matters [Qur'ān 7:145].²³

When Mūsā's anger was calmed, he took the tablets and in what was written on them was guidance and mercy for those who fear their Lord [Qur'ān 7:154].²⁴

Al-Nābulusī has recognised the Qur'ānic source of some of Ibn 'Arabī's statements and cites them as support for the story that Ibn 'Arabī is relating concerning Mūsā and Hārūn.

Although al-Nābulusī and Ibn 'Arabī are in agreement in the understanding of the basic plot of the two Qur'ānic accounts of the worship of the golden calf, they differ when Ibn 'Arabī proceeds beyond these accounts. Ibn 'Arabī states:

Mūsā knew more about the matter than Hārūn because he knew what the calf worshippers worshipped owing to his knowledge that 'God had commanded that nothing should be worshipped save Him'²⁵ and God does not command a thing but that it happens. Mūsā's rebuke of his brother Hārūn was because of his denial and inadequacy. So, the gnostic is he who sees God in everything, rather he sees Him as the same as everything.²⁶

The perfected gnostic is he who sees every object of worship as a manifestation of God in which He is worshipped.²⁷

These citations establish that Mūsā is a gnostic who can 'see' that God is in or is the same as everything. Consequently, the worship of the calf is the worship of God who is in or is 'the same as' the calf. In contrast, Hārūn is not a gnostic and cannot see God in or the same as the calf. He denied the worship because of his inadequate

²³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 255.

²⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 255.

²⁵ Qur'ān 17:23.

²⁶ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 192.

knowledge of the situation. Mūsā rebuked Hārūn for his ignorance of the truth of the matter of the calf. This is an inversion of the Qur'ānic accounts of the worship of the calf and Mūsā's reaction to it.²⁸

Furthermore, the interpretation of Qur'ān 17:23 to indicate that God commanded that whatever is worshipped in the world is actually the worship of God Himself is daring and bold.²⁹ However, Ibn 'Arabī qualifies this in two respects.

Firstly, citing Qur'ān 20:95, Ibn 'Arabī illustrates that Mūsā berated al-Sāmirī, who fashioned the calf, for 'turning away to the form of the calf in particular.'³⁰ He then states that:

Forms do not have any permanency. The form of the calf would have had to go, even if Mūsā had not rushed to burn it. ... He then said to him [al-Sāmirī], 'Look at your god.'³¹ He called it a god as an instructive reminder because he knew that it was a divine manifestation.³²

This suggests that although Mūsā is aware that God is in or is the same as everything and thus worshipped in everything, these objects of worship will all

²⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 195.

²⁸ Qur'ān 7:148 clearly condemns the worship of the calf, while 7:152-3 states that those who do not turn from this form of worship will suffer the wrath of God and shame in this life. Qur'ān 20:85 mentions that God told Mūsā that the Israelites have been tested in his absence and that al-Sāmirī has led them astray. God himself describes those who worship the calf as being astray from 'the straight path'. The Qur'ān indicates that Mūsā rebuked Hārūn because the Israelites had been seduced by an erroneous form of worship, not because Hārūn had misunderstood the situation.

²⁹ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 192. This particular statement of Ibn 'Arabī was quoted by Ibn Taymiyya in *al-Furqān*, p.155. Ibn Taymiyya states: 'This is one of the greatest libels against Mūsā and Hārūn, and against Allah, and against the worshippers of the calf'. This statement was significant in the polemical controversy which raged over the orthodoxy of Ibn 'Arabī's beliefs and writings. See Knysh, AD, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition - the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp.209-223.

³⁰ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 192.

³¹ Qur'ān 20:97.

disappear unlike God Himself. It appears that Mūsā recognises that different forms of worship of God are neither ‘right’ nor ‘wrong’, but that people should recognise the difference between the forms in which God appears and in which He is worshipped and God Himself.

Mūsā questions al-Sāmirī concerning his reasons for turning to the form of the calf in which to worship God. According to Qur’ān 20:88, the Israelites said when al-Sāmirī fashioned the calf, ‘This is your god and the god of Mūsā, but he has forgotten.’ Thus, when Mūsā says to al-Sāmirī, ‘Look at your god,’ he is demonstrating that the forms of the world in which God is worshipped are transient whereas God Himself is not.

Ibn ‘Arabī explains that Hārūn’s inability to prevent the worship of the calf was:

A wisdom from God appearing in existence so that He might be worshipped in every form although that form goes away afterwards. It only goes away after it has been dressed in divinity for its worshipper.³³

Not only does Ibn ‘Arabī explain that these forms in which God is worshipped are transient unlike God Himself, he also explains that gnostics, such as Mūsā, who are able to see God in or as the same as every thing are constrained in what they can say about their gnosis. Ibn ‘Arabī suggests:

Those who know the matter as it is appear to deny the forms that are worshipped, because their rank in knowledge makes them, by the law of the time, subject to the law of the messenger in whom they believe and in whose name they are called believers. They are servants of the time despite their knowledge that they [idol worshippers] did not worship the essences of forms, rather they worshipped

³² Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 192.

³³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 194.

God in them by virtue of the power of the manifestation which they knew from them [the forms]. Those that denied [this manifestation] and who had no knowledge of what is manifested were ignorant of it. The perfected gnostic veils it [the manifestation] from prophets, messengers and their inheritors. He commands them to distance themselves from those forms since the messenger of the time distanced himself from them out of obedience to the messenger.³⁴

Ibn ʿArabī is presenting a theory in which the religious zeitgeist imposes constraints on those living in a particular time. It makes no difference whether they are simple believers or perfected gnostics. The religious zeitgeist is defined by the prophet-messenger whose revelation is upheld and followed. In the above passage, Ibn ʿArabī refers to a messenger who brought a revelation prohibiting idolatry. This messenger is presumably Muḥammad. It may also refer to Mūsā who brought a revelation instructing people to believe in the One God. The gnostic, whether someone like Mūsā, Muḥammad, or, presumably, Ibn ʿArabī, will deny idol worship although they recognise that this worship is, in some sense, worship of God. They will also veil their knowledge of God's manifestation in the forms of the world even from the prophet, messenger or their inheritor whose laws and guidance they obey and follow.

Although Ibn ʿArabī qualifies his statements about gnostics being able to 'see God in everything or as the same as everything' by claiming that they comply with the religious norms of the age in which they live, it is apparent from the history of the polemics surrounding Ibn ʿArabī that his unqualified statements concerning gnosis

³⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 196. Ibn ʿArabī's text refers to two messengers (*rusul*): 'the messenger of the time' and 'the messenger'. 'The messenger of the time' obeys 'the messenger.' It is not certain who these may be.

were used by his detractors.³⁵ Al-Nābulusī echoes and amplifies Ibn ʿArabī's statements concerning the constraints of religious norms on gnostics, but his comments about the worship of the calf and about gnosis will reveal his position vis-à-vis Ibn ʿArabī on these contentious issues.

Al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn ʿArabī that Mūsā is a gnostic while Hārūn, in contrast, is not. Mūsā perceives the 'true relationship' between God and the world. Hārūn is not aware of this relationship and fears his brother's anger over the consequences of the emergence of idolatry among the Israelites. He cannot see that this worship is essentially the worship of God even if the calf worshippers themselves do not perceive this 'truth.' Al-Nābulusī recognised the importance of the relationship between God and the world in his opening words on the chapter:

The wisdom associated with Hārūn comprises the explanation of the appearance of the One Essence in many forms.³⁶

Al-Nābulusī now begins to alter subtly Ibn ʿArabī's original statement concerning gnosis and in so doing introduces new themes:

Mūsā was more knowledgeable than Hārūn concerning the divine matter as it really is, because he knew what the calf worshippers worshipped, but they did not know. And so they were unbelievers in their worship of what is not God in their eyes, although 'they said "this is your god and the God of Mūsā."' ³⁷ [This is] as God narrated it with regard to what al-Sāmirī said, while they followed him in that. It was a calf for them with respect to what they saw and knew so that if you were to have asked them about it they would have said that it was a calf. But God is not a calf and may He be truly exalted above that.³⁸

³⁵ See Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, pp.87-111, & 209-223; and Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Furqān*; and al-Shaʿrānī, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb al-Yawāqīt wa'l-Jawāhir fī Bayān ʿAqā'id al-Akābir* (Cairo: Būlāq, 1890), pp.13-4.

³⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 254.

³⁷ Qur'ān 20:88.

³⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256.

The most important point to emerge from the above citation is that, whereas Mūsā knew that the Israelites were really worshipping God who is manifested in or as the calf, the Israelites believed they were worshipping the calf. Al-Nābulusī states that the Israelites were unbelievers (*kafarū*). On one level, he is agreeing with the Qur'ānic story which condemns the worship of the calf. Al-Nābulusī disagrees with Ibn 'Arabī who suggests that worship of the calf can be understood as worship of God because God is worshipped in the calf, although the worshippers may be ignorant of the true object of their devotion.

Al-Nābulusī has highlighted the importance of the worshipper's knowledge for determining the correct understanding of a given form of worship. It can be inferred from al-Nābulusī's statements that if the Israelites had known that they were really worshipping God as manifested in the form of the calf, their worship would not have been unbelief. Whereas Ibn 'Arabī's discussion is interested in the worship of the calf *per se*, al-Nābulusī's comments are concerned with the subjective knowledge of the object of worship.

In the context of the history of polemics concerning Ibn 'Arabī's writings about the worship of God in the forms of the world, al-Nābulusī appears to be presenting a counter-view to those of Ibn 'Arabī's detractors. Al-Nābulusī stresses that the calf is not God. He agrees with the detractors that the Israelites' worship of the calf was unbelief, but adds that a gnostic like Mūsā witnesses that God is manifest in or as the

calf, concurring with Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding of Qur’ān 17:23, ‘And your Lord commanded that you shall worship nothing save Him.’³⁹

He who knows God is he who sees, that is to say witnesses, God appearing in every sense perceptible, intelligible and imaginary thing, rather he sees Him as the same as everything with respect to the Existence which sustains all the originally non-existent transient forms other than Itself. This is God’s statement that ‘everything is perishing save His face which has the command and to which you shall return.’⁴⁰

Al-Nābulusī has introduced a thematic change to Ibn ‘Arabī’s text and has also included fresh scriptural support for his argument. Having defined the locus of God’s appearance in the world, al-Nābulusī argues that it is God as Existence (*al-wujūd*) that appears in the world.⁴¹ This Existence sustains the world which is fundamentally non-existent. The world of non-existent forms is perishing. Only God’s Existence or face is permanent. This theme is amplified elsewhere in his commentary:

God is creating everything. He is sustaining everything. If it were not for the attention of God’s command for everything at every moment through existentiatio, they would not exist. Everything is existent through God’s perpetual existentiatio in the universals and particulars. But all things in themselves without regard to God’s existentiatio of them are originally non-existent possessing no existence at all. They have not inhaled the fragrance of existence at all.⁴²

He [the Absolute God] is the same as all imaginary, intelligible, and sense-perceptible things with respect to manifestation and unveiling through Absolute Existence, and not with respect to non-existent possible forms which appear in that divine manifestation and lordly unveiling.⁴³

³⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256.

⁴⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256. The Qur’ānic citation is Qur’ān 28:88.

⁴¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 157, comments that there are two kinds of existence: eternally pre-existent existence which is the origin and which is absolutely free of all constraints (*al-wujūd al-qadīm ... al-muṭlaq*); and originated existence which is eternally pre-existent existence but mixed with forms and their states which have no existence save through it [eternally pre-existent existence]. This existence is constrained by all the non-existent constraints (*[al-wujūd] al-muqayyad*). Eternally pre-existent existence is general (*‘āmm*) while originated existence is specific (*khāṣṣ*). The originated existence has everything that is in the eternally pre-existent existence and something additional (*ziyāda*). However, the eternally pre-existent existence does not have what is additional (*al-ziyāda*) in the originated existence.

⁴² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 334.

⁴³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 341.

Unlike Ibn ʿArabī who is stating that God is seen in or as everything, al-Nābulusī introduces the important abstract concept of existence. God as existence is the same as everything and is in everything. This maintains a distinction between God who is not existence and God who is existence. It is God in one of His aspects who appears in the world. From al-Nābulusī's use of Qur'ān 28:88, it follows that God's face is His existence in which and through which the world *is* and thus God can appear in and through the world as existence.

Al-Nābulusī also maintains the distinction between God and the world. It is ambiguous in Ibn ʿArabī's text whether there is ultimately a distinction between God and the world when gnostics can see God in or as the world. However, for al-Nābulusī, God is permanent whereas the world is perishing. God is existence while the world is fundamentally non-existent.

Not only does al-Nābulusī alter Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of what the gnostics see, he also discusses gnosis (*maʿrifa*) elsewhere in the commentary:

The originated created thing is aware of the pre-eternally existent Creator possessing him only in accordance with His appearance to him and not in accordance with what He is in Himself.⁴⁴

When asked about the gnosis of God - that is to say what it is - and about the gnostic - that is to say what he is - Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd said that 'the colour of water is the colour of its vessel.' This means that the gnosis of God is that you know that He is absolute possessing no form in sense perception, intellect nor in imagination at all. However, the gnostic is he who reveals what is in his sense-perception, intellect and imagination. So, he sees the absolute God appearing to him according to his predisposition in sense-perception, intellect, and imagination in all those forms as a manifestation with respect to the one who sees and what is seen. [This is] because what is seen is what it is and has not changed, but the one who sees changes through states and conditions. Thus

⁴⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 145.

gnosis varies for him. The manifestation of God, which is known, varies forever in this world and the next.⁴⁵

Al-Nābulusī's comments about gnosis establish an important point. They maintain the distinction between God as He is in Himself and God as He appears to the gnostic and the world. This supports his understanding of Ibn 'Arabī that the God which appears in everything or as the same as everything is not God as He is in Himself. God in Himself has no form. Man depends on his senses, intellect and imagination to understand the world. Through these faculties he perceives the world around him in terms of form. God is beyond form. Al-Nābulusī promotes an understanding of Ibn 'Arabī which maintains the difference between God and the world despite the theory that God appears in or as the world.

Whereas al-Nābulusī holds that there is a distinction between the real God who is beyond form and the 'metaphorical' God who has various forms⁴⁶, it can be argued that Ibn 'Arabī holds that the Divine Essence, the true God, is meaningless without the divine attributes.⁴⁷ God is His attributes. Such a position is quite different to al-Nābulusī's which affirms the meaningfulness of the Divine Essence as the true God which is beyond form.

The above citations elucidate an important aspect of Qur'ān 28:88, which al-Nābulusī has used. This is that God is unchanging and permanent. Qur'ān 28:88

⁴⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 333.

⁴⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 340, states, 'If He [God] wishes, He is transcendent in his [the servant's] belief with respect to the lack of specification of form in His self which that servant knows. This is rational metaphorical transcendence, not real transcendence in which God is in His self.'

states that ‘every thing is perishing save His face.’ Al-Nābulusī has explained that it is the fundamentally non-existent forms of the world which are transient and which depend on God for their existence. This provides a new context in which to appreciate Mūsā’s rebuke of al-Sāmirī for fashioning the calf as an object of worship:

What do you have to say al-Sāmirī about what you have made with regard to your turning away from the Absolute God to the form of the calf which is one of the faces of the divine manifestation?⁴⁸

Al-Nābulusī’s comments bring to the fore Ibn ‘Arabī’s basic point which is that al-Sāmirī is questioned about his motivation for turning away from the worship of the One True God to the worship of one of His manifestations in a form of the created world. Mūsā, being a gnostic, knows that God is manifesting Himself in the calf with regard to His existence and sustenance of the calf. He is also aware that this manifestation will perish unlike God Himself whose ‘face’ will remain.

Furthermore, it appears from the Qur’ānic accounts and from Ibn ‘Arabī’s and al-Nābulusī’s understanding of them that al-Sāmirī did not know that God was manifest in the calf. He, like the Israelites whom he convinced to worship the calf, did not know that the calf was not God although brought into existence and sustained by God. They had lost sight of the Absolute God through their devotion to a specific form. This determined their worship to be unbelief. Mūsā was therefore forced to destroy the calf because of their ignorance of the ‘truth’ of the matter.

⁴⁷ Nettler, RL, ‘The Figure and Truth of Abraham in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fusus al-Hikam*’, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*, 24 (1998), 21-50 (pp.30-1).

⁴⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 257.

Al-Nābulusī has consistently shown a concern with the subjective awareness of what is worshipped. This subjective awareness determines whether a particular form of worship is legitimate belief or not. Unlike Ibn ʿArabī, he introduces elements of traditional Sufi psychology to support his argument in this regard:

With regard to the appearance of God in everything and His being veiled by virtue of the self, the heart says that the existent God and His causing of effects are appearing in every thing. The self says that it is not the God because of the spiritual and sensual form. So, if the heart is dominant, it knows and recognises [the truth] and ladles out [knowledge] from the sea of gnosis. However, if the self is dominant, it denies [the heart's] idea and God's face is veiled from it [the self].⁴⁹

Al-Nābulusī views the heart as possessing a higher and more sublime function than that of the self. He also recognises the fact that the heart can be weak in the face of a strong self. If the self is stronger than the heart then that self will convince its possessor that God cannot appear in sensual and spiritual forms. That person will not see God's face. The self will be the veil hiding God from him. However, if the heart is dominant, then God's face will appear to its possessor. God will be seen to appear in sensual and spiritual forms.

In another part of his commentary, al-Nābulusī writes about the heart and self:

The secret is in the self and the heart. The self is mine and the heart is His, but the self is the heart; nevertheless, it is not it [too]. Indifference belongs to the self whereas change (*taqallub*) belongs to the heart. Ignorance belongs to the self while knowledge belongs to the heart. The self becomes the heart through being changed by God. The Prophet said, 'The believer's heart is between two of the Merciful One's fingers and he turns (*yuqallib*) it as He wants.' He said, 'O God! Oh Turner of hearts! Confirm my heart in Your religion.' He said, 'Neither My earth nor My heaven encompass Me. Only the heart of My believing servant encompasses Me.' The heart becomes a self through competing for God and [through] indifference toward appearances. Thereupon, 'Whoever knows himself knows his Lord.' He said, 'Fight your self for it has risen up to fight Me.'⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 260.

⁵⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 165.

Al-Nābulusī is elaborating themes concerning the heart and self that are in accordance with traditional Sufi psychology:

Sufi psychology, like everything else in Sufism, is based on Koranic ideas - the ideas on the *nafs* [are] the lowest principle of man Higher than the *nafs* is the *qalb*, "heart," and the *rūḥ*, "spirit."⁵¹

And,

As to the words "I have cleared my heart of all motives related to the self", no blessing arises from anything in which selfish interest has a part.⁵² ... The mystics of this sect [the followers of Sahl b. °Abdallāh al-Tustarī], however, are agreed that it [*nafs*] is the source and principle of evil. ... They all agree that through it base qualities are manifested and that it is the immediate cause of blameworthy actions. ... Hence, resistance to the lower soul is the chief of all acts of devotion and the crown of all acts of self-mortification, and only thereby can Man find the way to God, because submission to the lower soul involves his destruction and resistance to it involves his salvation.⁵³ ... When gnosis is established in the heart of the gnostic, the empire of doubt and scepticism and agnosticism is utterly destroyed, and the sovereignty of gnosis subdues his senses and passions so that in all his looks and acts and words he remains within the circle of its authority.⁵⁴

In a commentary upon Ibn °Arabī's discussion of the gnostic perception of God appearing in and as everything, al-Nābulusī raises the issue of Sufi psychology. He elaborates his understanding of the role of the heart and self in the acquisition of gnosis. In doing this, he reveals his debt to and his reliance upon the Sufi heritage concerning the psychology of 'the path toward God.' This suggests the vitality and durability of the Sufi psychology inherited by al-Nābulusī. Concepts and experiences valid for Sufis for hundreds of years appear to have been still valid and relevant to al-Nābulusī and the Sufis of his age.

⁵¹ Schimmel, A, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p.191.

⁵² Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. by RA Nicholson (Leiden: Brill, 1911), p.3.

⁵³ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, pp.196-7.

⁵⁴ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, p.289. Similar themes of the contrast between heart (*qalb*) and self/soul (*nafs*) can be found in the works of other early Sufi writers such as al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Ri'āya*, edited by

One last significant difference between Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī emerges in this discussion of God in the chapter on Hārūn. Ibn ʿArabī states that:

The Messenger came and he called them [the pagan idolaters] to a single God who is known but not witnessed. ... He called [them] to a god who is the object of intentions, who is known altogether, but not witnessed.⁵⁵

For Ibn ʿArabī, Muḥammad's religion made God the object of intentions and worship. This God is known. However, He cannot be witnessed. Idolatry in any form is prohibited, despite the fact that gnostics may perceive God in every form of the world.

Al-Nābulusī's understanding and alteration of Ibn ʿArabī's statement are predictable in the light of his earlier comments:

The Messenger-Prophet called for the worship of a God, a true object of worship, which is contemplated for the acquisition of needs and known by His believers altogether in His presences and the perfection which is His due, but not witnessed with respect to His Absolute Essence, although witnessed with regard to the manifestations of His names and attributes.⁵⁶

Al-Nābulusī has mentioned that God is both known and not known as well as witnessed and not witnessed. The pivotal factor is the degree of knowledge or witnessing. He states elsewhere in the commentary:

[God] is not known at all with regard to what He is, but He is known with regard to this God no matter how fashioned in the self.⁵⁷

M Smith (London: Luzac, 1940), p.332 and al-Qushayrī, *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī ʿIlm al-Taṣawwuf* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1990), pp.84, 87, 152 and 154.

⁵⁵ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 196. This establishes a god who is known in the mind, but not actually witnessed or seen with the eyes.

⁵⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 265.

⁵⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 336.

For Ibn ʿArabī God is known but not witnessed. Al-Nābulusī introduces levels of sophistication in an attempt to justify and explain the contentious aspects and also to amplify the orthodox elements in Ibn ʿArabī's original text. He remarks that God is known in one respect, and yet has argued that God is not known in relation to what He is in Himself. He pleads that God is witnessed in sensory, intelligible and imaginary forms yet is not witnessed in these forms in relation to what He is in Himself.

This appears to be a return to the issue of oneness and multiplicity, of remoteness and manifestation. Al-Nābulusī stated at the beginning of his commentary on the chapter on Hārūn that 'the wisdom associated with Hārūn comprises the explanation of the appearance of the One Essence in many forms.'⁵⁸ God is not known as the Absolute Essence, which is utterly one and utterly remote from the world of creation. However, He is known in the realm of multiplicity which is where His names and attributes are witnessed. God is witnessed in creation by those who possess the necessary gnosis.

Prophets, Messengers and Friends of God

Ibn ʿArabī mentions the concepts of *nabī* and *rasūl* in various parts of his chapter on Hārūn. He refers to both Mūsā and Hārūn as prophets (*nabī*) while implicitly referring to Muḥammad as messenger (*rasūl*).⁵⁹ He also highlights those

⁵⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 254.

⁵⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 191 & 196. The implicit reference to Muḥammad on page 196 is where Ibn ʿArabī states that 'the messenger came [to the idol worshippers] and called them to a single god who is known but not witnessed.'

who inherit from the prophets and messengers (*wārith ʿanhum*).⁶⁰ It has already been shown above how Ibn ʿArabī argues that gnostics are subject to the law of the messenger in whom they believe and by whose name they are called believers. Gnostics are subject to the constraints of the religious age in which they live. Al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn ʿArabī in this respect.

However, unlike Ibn ʿArabī in this chapter, al-Nābulusī discusses the relationship between messengers (*rasūl*), prophets (*nabī*), and friends of God (*walī*) in detail. In order to appreciate al-Nābulusī's statements on these important concepts, a summary of how they have been understood in the Islamic tradition is necessary.

In the Qur'ān, the word *rasūl* can be applied to anyone who is sent with a message.⁶¹ Qur'ān 6:48 describes those who are sent with a message (*mursalīn*) as 'announcers' and 'warners'. Furthermore, Qur'ān 7:188 portrays Muḥammad as being an announcer and a warner, but not knowing anything of the 'unseen'. He is an ordinary human being who has been selected by God to convey a message to his community.

The Arabic word for prophet, *nabī*, appears in the Qur'ān much less frequently than *rasūl*. It is not applied to any of the messengers in the Arabian tradition, such as Hūd and Šāliḥ, but only to figures mentioned in the Old and New Testament.⁶² The

⁶⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 196.

⁶¹ Watt, WM & Bell, R. *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp.25-8.

⁶² Watt & Bell, *Introduction*, p.28.

notable exception to this is Muhammad, who is addressed as a prophet in the Qur'ān (for example Qur'ān 33:1, 6, 7; 66:1, 8f.). Prophets appear to be those sent by God as preachers and warners to their people, but are not heads of a community like the *rasūl*.⁶³

The doctrine at the basis of the Qur'ānic utterances on *rasūl* and *nabī* is not always clear.⁶⁴ Wensinck argues that the difference between *rasūl* and *nabī* seems in later literature to disappear in the general teaching about the prophets.⁶⁵ He does suggest that one difference is that the *rasūl*, in contrast to the prophet, is a law-giver and is provided with a book.⁶⁶ Montgomery Watt notes that later Muslim scholars did debate whether the rank of *nabī* or *rasūl* was higher, and whether every prophet had to be a messenger or *vice versa*.⁶⁷

Waldman, like Wensinck, Friedmann, and others, affirms the basic distinction between *rasūl* and *nabī*.⁶⁸ She also raises the subject of Sufism in this context. She suggests that the Sufi sheikh identified himself with the spiritual, if not genealogical, legacy of the *nabī* because he could receive individual divine inspiration and achieve

⁶³ Wensinck, AJ, 'Rasūl' in *El*² (Leiden: Brill, 1995), VIII, 454-5 (p.454).

⁶⁴ Wensinck, 'Rasūl', p.454.

⁶⁵ Wensinck, 'Rasūl', p.455.

⁶⁶ Wensinck, 'Rasūl', p.455. Friedmann, Y, *Prophecy Continuous - Aspects of Aḥmadī Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p.69, echoes and amplifies this contrast between the *nabī* and *rasūl*. He notes that the classical Islamic tradition is aware of the distinction between legislative and non-legislative prophecy. A messenger (*rasūl*) is someone to whom God has revealed a book and a law, whereas a prophet (*nabī*) is said to be someone who was commanded by God to propagate a law brought by someone who had preceded him.

⁶⁷ Watt & Bell, *Introduction*, pp.28-9.

⁶⁸ Waldman, MR, 'Nubūwah', in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by M Eliade and others (MacMillan and Free Press, 1987), XI, 1-7 (p.2).

intimacy with God.⁶⁹ It is noted by Radtke and O’Kane that Islam, whether in the Qur’ān or in *ḥadīth*, did not originally recognise the existence of a special category of holy men who enjoyed a close, privileged relationship with God.⁷⁰ Unlike the concepts of *rasūl* and *nabī*, which do appear clearly in the Qur’ān, the concept of *walī* is an ambiguous one in the Qur’ān.⁷¹ Popular Islam did come to understand the *walī* as a particular kind of friend of God, one whose special closeness to divinity mediated between the ordinary faithful and God.⁷²

Radtke and O’Kane argue that a complete system of thought regarding the friends of God (*awliyā’*) had been developed by the second half of the 9th century in the writings of Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.⁷³ Friedmann remarks that it was only the late Sufi thinkers who made use of the possibility that prophets (as distinguished from messengers) would appear after Muḥammad’s death.⁷⁴ These prophets would only reaffirm Muḥammad’s law. Ibn ‘Arabī benefited from al-Tirmidhī’s writings on the friends of God and prophets.⁷⁵ He held that the most perfect servants of God, *awliyā’*,

⁶⁹ Waldman, ‘Nubūwah’, p.5.

⁷⁰ Radtke, B & O’Kane, J, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), p.7.

⁷¹ Cohn, RL, ‘Sainthood’, in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by M Eliade and others (MacMillan and Free Press, 1987), XIII, 1-6 (p.2), remarks that the word *walīy* is used in the Qur’ān to refer to both God and to God’s ‘friends’, that is to say pious people in general. Landolt, H, ‘Walāyah’, in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by M Eliade and others (MacMillan and Free Press, 1987), XV, 316-323 (p.316), comments on the use of *walī* and *mawlā* in the Qur’ān too.

⁷² Cohn, ‘Sainthood’, p.2.

⁷³ Radtke & O’Kane, *The Concept*, p.8.

⁷⁴ Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, p.69.

⁷⁵ Addas, C, *Quest for the Red Sulphur - the Life of Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans. by P Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp.80 n.22, 204, & 220.

in each generation were given a spiritual rank equal to that of the non-legislative prophets of old.⁷⁶ This was called general prophethood - *mubūwa ʿāmma*.

Landolt describes the controversy that this distinction between legislative and non-legislative prophethood caused among Sufis.⁷⁷ Sahl al-Tustarī (d.896) did not seem to make an essential distinction between prophets generally and the *awliyāʾ*. Al-Kharrāz (d.890/1) wrote polemics against certain Sufis who placed the *awliyāʾ* above the prophets. Al-Kharrāz held that the *awliyāʾ* are always placed under a prophet known by name and on whose behalf they call people to God. Al-Tirmidhī (d.905-910), on the other hand, believed that *awliyāʾ* and ordinary prophets were a rank lower than law-giving prophets. He does not distinguish between the ordinary, non-legislative prophets and the friends of God or those who are inspired by divine inspiration.⁷⁸

This issue of the relative merits of *awliyāʾ*, prophets and messengers became significant in Islam. Both al-Taḥāwī's (d.933) and al-Nasafī's (d.1142) creed mention it:

We do not set any one of the saints above any of the prophets, but we say, 'One prophet is more excellent than all the saints'.⁷⁹

The saint does not reach the level of the prophets. The (ordinary) person does not come to a position where (God's) commands and prohibitions and the scriptural texts in their external sense are no longer applicable to him. To turn from these to the interpretations of the people of internal meanings

⁷⁶ Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, p.74.

⁷⁷ Landolt, 'Walāyah', p.322.

⁷⁸ Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, p.88.

⁷⁹ Watt, WM (translator), *Islamic Creeds - A Selection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p.55. This is article 42 of al-Taḥāwī's creed.

is heresy. To reject the scriptural texts is unbelief. To regard sin as lawful is unbelief, to make light (of sin) is unbelief, and contempt for the law is unbelief.⁸⁰

It has been mentioned above that Ibn ʿArabī made use of al-Tirmidhī's writings in developing his own ideas on *awliyāʾ*, prophets and messengers. Both Landolt and Friedmann note that Ibn ʿArabī exploited this heritage.⁸¹ It is significant in this light that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī highlights six specific charges levelled against Ibn ʿArabī by his detractors. One of these charges is that Ibn ʿArabī believed that the friend of God is better than the messenger.⁸²

Knysh notes that there was also an issue of religious authority inherent in the polemics over the relationship between the *walī* and the prophet:

Particularly suspicious in the eyes of the guardians of Islam's purity was the Sufi notion of sainthood (*wilāya*), which, according to many Sufi theorists, renders the Sufi 'friend of God' (*walī*) a natural heir to the Prophet, in as much as they have direct access to the source of divine revelation. This claim was vigorously rejected by those traditionalist *ʿulamāʾ* who considered themselves to be the only legitimate interpreters and custodians of the Prophet's authority.⁸³

Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī

In his chapter on Hārūn, Ibn ʿArabī refers to the concepts of messenger (*rasūl*), prophet (*nabī*), and their inheritor (*wārith ʿanhum*). He does not refer to any particular individual when using the term messenger, however it does appear to refer to a figure such as Muḥammad who brought a specific message:

⁸⁰ Watt, *Islamic Creeds*, p.84. This is article 34 of al-Nasafī's creed.

⁸¹ Landolt, 'Walāyah', p.322; & Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, pp.88-9.

⁸² Al-Shaʿrānī, *Kitāb al-Yawāqūt*, p.13.

⁸³ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.53.

The messenger came and called them [idol worshippers] to one God who is known but not seen.⁸⁴

Furthermore, Ibn ʿArabī makes a distinction between ‘the messenger’ (*al-rasūl*) and ‘the messenger of the age’ (*rasūl al-waqt*):

The messenger of the age kept away from them [idols] out of obedience to the messenger.⁸⁵

It is uncertain from Ibn ʿArabī’s text what the difference between these two figures is other than the fact that one brings a message and the other follows the former.

With regard to Mūsā, Ibn ʿArabī explicitly describes him as a prophet (*nabī*) and refers to him as a gnostic (ʿ*ārif*).⁸⁶ It is not necessarily implied that he is not a messenger in the text. Ibn ʿArabī states that Mūsā is a greater prophet than Hārūn and that he is more knowledgeable about the worship of the calf than Hārūn.⁸⁷ His knowledge about the calf-worship appears to make him a gnostic.

On the basis that Ibn ʿArabī refers to Mūsā as a gnostic, it follows that Ibn ʿArabī may be alluding to him when he refers to a ‘gnostic who veils the knowledge of God’s manifestation in the forms of the world from prophets, messengers and their inheritors.’⁸⁸ As a gnostic he is subject to the religious constraints of the age and of the messenger in whose divine message he believes.

⁸⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 196.

⁸⁵ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 196.

⁸⁶ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 191-2.

⁸⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 191-2.

⁸⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 196.

Like Mūsā, Hārūn is described by Ibn ʿArabī as a prophet (*nabī*).⁸⁹ Whereas Mūsā knows what the calf-worshippers are actually worshipping, Hārūn does not.

Hārūn is scolded by Mūsā for denying and not being able to comprehend it.⁹⁰ It appears that Ibn ʿArabī refers to Hārūn again when he says:

They [idolaters] worshipped God in them [forms] by virtue of the power of the manifestation which they [gnostics] knew from them [idolaters] and of which those who deny and who have no knowledge of what is manifest are ignorant.⁹¹

Hārūn is portrayed as denying the calf-worship and as being unaware of what the Israelites were actually worshipping. He is contrasted with Mūsā who had to teach him this knowledge. The above citation contrasts the gnostics with those who deny and are ignorant of the divine manifestations in the forms of the world. Although both Mūsā and Hārūn are prophets, Mūsā appears to be the greater prophet because of his knowledge of divine manifestations.

Ibn ʿArabī refers to those who inherit from the prophets and messengers, but does not specify who or what they are. It is supposition to suggest that these inheritors might be either *ʿulamā* or friends of God. There is no evidence for either assertion. However, what is clear is that the gnostic will veil his knowledge from them because of the religious constraints of the age in which he lives.

There is an ambiguity in Ibn ʿArabī's text concerning Mūsā's motive for imparting to Hārūn the knowledge of the divine manifestations. Ibn ʿArabī states that

⁸⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 191.

⁹⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 192.

the gnostic veils such knowledge from prophets, messengers and their inheritors, yet Mūsā is said to reveal this knowledge to Hārūn. There is no explanation for this apparent contradiction.

Al-Nābulusī discusses at length the concepts of messenger (*rasūl*), prophet (*nabī*), and friend of God (*walī*). He discusses these concepts in relation to Mūsā, Hārūn and al-Khidr in various parts of his commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's chapter on Hārūn.⁹² These concepts as understood by al-Nābulusī shall be examined before analysing al-Nābulusī's use of the Qur'ānic story concerning the encounter between Mūsā and al-Khidr.

Al-Nābulusī provides definitions of these concepts:

A messenger, that is to say someone who possesses a book and a law, and a prophet, someone who affirms a law [that came] before him, and an inheritor, who is one of the friends of God, of the divine knowledge from the messengers and prophets.⁹³

Al-Nābulusī explicitly states that both Mūsā and Hārūn are messengers:

⁹¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 196.

⁹² Wensinck, AJ, 'Al-Khaḍir', in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1978), IV, 902-5 (p.902) states that the legends and stories regarding al-Khaḍir are primarily associated with the Qur'ānic story in 18:59-81. The servant of God in this story is called al-Khaḍir by the majority of Qur'ānic commentators. Wensinck (pp.903-4) argues that of the various explanations of the Qur'ānic term 'union of the two seas' (*majmaʿ al-baḥrain*) found in this story a far-fetched one is that this union means the meeting of Mūsā and al-Khaḍir, the two seas of wisdom. Al-Nābulusī would disagree with him. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.65, mentions 'the famous encounter between the Qur'ānic Moses (Musa), a typical bearer of the exoteric religious law, and al-Khidr, whom the Sufi tradition presented as an embodiment of the superior esoteric truth that eludes the rank and file.' Knysh (p.296, n.114) states that Khidr was a popular personage of the Sufi literature and Middle Eastern folklore. Various miraculous feats are attributed to him. He is particularly important for the Sufi lore that portrays him as a paragon of the friend of God (*wali Allah*), who ministers to Sufi novices, enlightening them on various ethical or theological dilemmas.

⁹³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 264.

Mūsā was a greater prophet than his brother Hārūn because he was meant to convey a message to Pharaoh and the Israelites, while his brother was to help him in that.⁹⁴

However, when he [Hārūn] crossed from it [the stage of friendship (*ṭawr al-walāya*)] to the stage of prophethood, the necessity of witnessing multiplicity overcame him in particular, while he was a messenger to the Israelites with his brother Mūsā.⁹⁵

It follows that both Mūsā and Hārūn brought a book and a law to Pharaoh and the Israelites. Al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn ʿArabī that Mūsā was a greater prophet than Hārūn, because of his greater knowledge of what the calf-worshippers were actually worshipping. However, al-Nābulusī introduces a discussion about friendship with God (*walāyah*) and prophethood to explain the difference between Mūsā and Hārūn.

Ibn ʿArabī implies that Hārūn had no appreciation or knowledge of the reality of the calf-worship. Al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn ʿArabī that Mūsā had to instruct Hārūn about this, however, he adds that:

Mūsā used to guide and teach his brother Hārūn in gnosis (*dhawq*) and realisation (*taḥqīq*), although Mūsā was younger ...and although Hārūn also was not lacking in that [knowledge] because he possessed the stage of friendship (*ṭawr al-walāya*) while he was a prophet. Thus, its stage [that of prophethood] was over that stage [that of friendship]. However, when he crossed from it [the stage of friendship] to the stage of prophethood, the necessity of witnessing multiplicity in particular overcame him while he was a messenger (*rasūl*) to the Israelites with his brother Mūsā.⁹⁶

Gnosis and realisation are linked to the stage of friendship. Friends of God are gnostics. However, prophethood is above friendship with God. Hārūn, like Mūsā,

⁹⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 254.

⁹⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256.

was a friend of God, but when he became a prophet, his gnosis was lost in his prophethood and mission to the Israelites. Hārūn qua prophet and messenger is not able to access his gnosis and realisation. He is overcome by the necessity of witnessing multiplicity.⁹⁷ It is curious that Mūsā, who is also a prophet and messenger, is able to access his gnosis and realisation.⁹⁸ It appears that this is what makes Mūsā the greater prophet; it is implied that he is not overcome by witnessing multiplicity.

Al-Nābulusī explains that because Hārūn was a messenger to the Israelites he had to mix with his people.⁹⁹ This obliged him to adopt their manners of speech and behaviour. He argues:

The prophets are friends of God before they are prophets. However, if they are addressed from the station of prophethood, they act like their people, because they were sent to them. The prophets who are not sent with messages, like al-Khidr, are addressed through worship from the station of friendship with God. Their law is reality.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256.

⁹⁷ In the chapter on Ibrāhīm in this thesis there is a discussion of al-Nābulusī's use of the traditional Sufi modes of knowing God - 'the first separation', 'the union after the first separation', and 'the union of the union' or 'the second separation.' The first separation appears to be a view of reality in which all things are seen to be separated and from which God is utterly transcendent. This view is shared by the generality of mankind and is endorsed by revelation. It is permitted to worship God as an intellectual or imaginary form, but not as a sensory form. The worship of sensory forms, such as stones or stars, is prohibited.

⁹⁸ It appears that Mūsā, unlike Hārūn, is not constrained by the witnessing of multiplicity. His gnosis enables him to witness the one God appearing in or manifesting Himself as the same as the forms of the world. In the chapter on Ibrāhīm in this thesis, the highest state of awareness of reality is described as being 'the union of the union' or 'the second separation.' This is where the mystic witnesses an existential oneness in which 'resides' a multiplicity of the forms of non-existent things. The oneness is God's existence, while the multiplicity is the forms of creation. Unity and multiplicity are balanced, giving the 'highest' appreciation of reality.

⁹⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256. This is an important traditional theme in Sufi tradition - the dichotomy of *sharʿ* or *sharʿa* and *ḥaqīqa*. Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, pp.383-4, states: '*Ḥaqīqa*, then, signifies a reality which does not admit of abrogation and remains in equal force from the time of Adam to the end of the world, like knowledge of God and like religious practice, which is made perfect by sincere intention; and *sharʿat* signifies a reality which admits of abrogation and alteration, like ordinances and commandments. Therefore *sharʿat* is Man's act, while *ḥaqīqat* is God's keeping and preservation and protection, whence it follows that *sharʿat* cannot possibly be maintained without the existence of *ḥaqīqat*, and *ḥaqīqat* cannot be maintained without observance of *sharʿat*.'

He further comments in this regard that:

The presence from which the perfect one is not addressed has no interest for him nor is his heart preoccupied with bearing it [the presence], although he possesses it within his station. Thus, it has been said, 'We have dived into a sea at whose shore the prophets have stopped.' [By prophets] it means those of them who have been sent because they have not dived into the sea of friendship with God within their station. [This is] because their [public] address is in the manner in which their public is addressed.¹⁰¹

Al-Nābulusī understands that all messengers are prophets and that all prophets are friends of God. However, not all prophets and not all friends of God are messengers. Those who are messengers do not 'dive into the sea of friendship with God.' Messengers are thus denied access to the gnosis that they do actually possess. Mūsā appears to be an exception to this generalisation.

Like all messengers and prophets, Mūsā and Hārūn are described as being friends of God (*walī*). Al-Nābulusī gives an example of a prophet who is not sent with a message from God to a given people. This is al-Khidr. This type of prophet is said to have 'dived into a sea at whose shore the prophets have stopped.'¹⁰² It is implied that such a friend of God is a gnostic who can see God appearing in everything or as the same as everything. However, he veils this knowledge from messengers, prophets and those that inherit from them, because they have not 'dived into this sea.'

... The Law without the Truth is ostentation, and the Truth without the Law is hypocrisy. ... The Law is one of the acts acquired by Man, but the Truth is one of the gifts bestowed by God.' Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi*, p.78, explains that *sharī'a* is the exoteric law of the 'ulamā' whereas *ḥaqīqa* is the esoteric perception of God and the world possessed by Sufi sages. He shows that an early Sufi critic of Ibn 'Arabi, following many mystically minded *Shāfi'ī* theologians before him, viewed the *sharī'a/ḥaqīqa* dichotomy as mirroring two different stages of the believers' spiritual attainment as well as two disparate visions of God and the world. This fits in rather well with al-Nābulusī's emerging view of this dichotomy which is also couched in other phrases by him.

¹⁰¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256-7.

Al-Nābulusī refers to the Qur'ānic account of the meeting between Mūsā and al-Khidr. He quotes Qur'ān 18:67-8:

Al-Khidr's statement to Mūsā was: 'You will not be able to be patient with me. How can you be patient about things you do not understand?'¹⁰³

Before discussing al-Nābulusī's use of this Qur'ānic citation, it is important to provide some of its original scriptural context. Mūsā embarked on a quest to reach the enigmatic 'junction of the two seas' (*majma' al-baḥrayn*). It is at this junction that he meets one of God's servants who has been graced with God's mercy and a special form of divine knowledge:

So they found one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed mercy from Ourselves and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own presence.¹⁰⁴

On meeting this mysterious servant, Mūsā asks:

May I follow you, on condition that you teach me something of the true faith which you have been taught?¹⁰⁵

It is at this point that al-Nābulusī's citation occurs. The mysterious servant of God, traditionally accepted as being al-Khidr, states that Mūsā will be unable to have patience with him. This implies that Mūsā, great as his prophethood was, lacked something which al-Khidr possessed. Mūsā knew he had something to learn from al-Khidr, and as the Qur'ānic story reveals this turned out to be the case. Mūsā failed to

¹⁰² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256.

¹⁰³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256.

¹⁰⁴ Qur'ān 18:65.

be patient with al-Khidr on three occasions where al-Khidr acted mysteriously in Mūsā's eyes. After al-Khidr explained his actions to Mūsā they decided to separate.

When comparing Mūsā to Hārūn, al-Nābulusī recognises a similarity in their relationship to that between Mūsā and al-Khidr. Al-Nābulusī argues that when Mūsā guides Hārūn to an awareness of the gnosis that he possesses within the station of his prophethood, this is similar to Mūsā knowing that within the stage of his own prophethood was what was within the stage of al-Khidr's friendship with God.¹⁰⁶ However, Mūsā was a greater prophet than Hārūn because he was able to reveal to Hārūn this gnostic knowledge. It is implied that al-Khidr is a greater friend of God because he was able to reveal to Mūsā the gnostic knowledge of which Mūsā was unaware.

In his chapter on Mūsā in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Ibn ʿArabī makes use of the encounter between Mūsā and al-Khidr.¹⁰⁷ It appears that Ibn ʿArabī uses this Qur'ānic story to describe how al-Khidr reminded Mūsā of things he had forgotten or did not realise he knew. Al-Khidr shows Mūsā that actions or events may appear to be one thing, but actually are another - what appears to be destruction can actually be

¹⁰⁵ Qur'ān 18:66.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 256.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 202 & 205-6.

salvation.¹⁰⁸ This story reveals that al-Khiḍr has a knowledge that Mūsā does not and vice versa. Ibn ʿArabī comments:

Look at the perfection of these two men ... and the justice of al-Khiḍr in what he recognised in Mūsā when he said, 'I have a knowledge which God taught me which you do not know, but you have a knowledge which God taught you that I do not know.' This advice of al-Khiḍr for Mūsā was a balm for the hurt he inflicted on Mūsā when he said, 'How can you be patient about things you do not understand?' [This] despite his [al-Khiḍr's] knowledge of the exaltedness of his [Mūsā's] rank as a messenger. Al-Khiḍr did not have this rank.¹⁰⁹

Ibn ʿArabī suggests that Mūsā was a degree more superior than al-Khiḍr, since Mūsā had a rank denied to al-Khiḍr, although they both had a knowledge that the other did not. They are both perfect but in different ways. However, Mūsā is the messenger and al-Khiḍr is not. Ultimately Mūsā is the greater of the two.

Al-Nābulusī explicitly contradicts this suggestion of Ibn ʿArabī in the chapter on Mūsā. In doing this he provides an invaluable insight into his views on messengers, prophets and friends of God. He comments on al-Khiḍr's address to Mūsā about their respective knowledge, recognising that this is a *ḥadīth* found in the collection of al-Bukhārī and others:

He said to him, 'I have an esoteric divine knowledge which God taught me, as He said, "We taught him a knowledge from Our own presence,"¹¹⁰ which you do not know. You have an exoteric divine knowledge which God taught you which I do not have.' The appearance of this from al-Khiḍr and not from Mūsā is an indication of al-Khiḍr having more knowledge than Mūsā.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ibn ʿArabī uses the story of the killing of the boy, the sinking of the boat, and the building of the wall. These are found in Qur'ān 18:71, 74, & 77.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 206.

¹¹⁰ Qur'ān 18:65.

¹¹¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 291.

At this point al-Nābulusī cites the text of a *ḥadīth* in al-Bukhārī's collection which suggests that al-Khidr was more knowledgeable than Mūsā. The parallel between Mūsā and Hārūn is striking. Al-Nābulusī compares their knowledge in another context too:

Al-Khidr's knowledge was esoteric and real while Mūsā's knowledge was exoteric and legal.¹¹²

If al-Khidr is more knowledgeable than Mūsā and his knowledge is characterised as being esoteric and real, then this suggests that al-Nābulusī may have believed that the esoteric was ultimately more significant than the exoteric. The exoteric appears to refer to revelation, law and messages to the people of this world. The esoteric is the mystical knowledge of figures such as al-Khidr and the friends of God. This is a very significant point. Al-Nābulusī confirms this interpretation:

The exoteric knowledge is of the particularities of the relation connected to the self, which is the condition of this world and nothing else. The esoteric knowledge is of the particularities of the divine relation, which is the condition of the next world. This world is quick to disappear, since it is little in relation to the next world. The next world is more permanent, and so knowledge of it is greater.¹¹³

Al-Khidr represents esoteric knowledge - the sea of friendship with God.

Mūsā represents exoteric knowledge - the sea of prophethood and messengership.

When Mūsā qua friend of God and gnostic instructs Hārūn in the esoteric knowledge of God, he is a greater prophet than Hārūn. However, when al-Khidr qua friend of

¹¹² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 291.

¹¹³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 291.

God and gnostic instructs Mūsā in this esoteric knowledge, he is a greater prophet qua friend of God than Mūsā. The parallel is striking.

In the chapter on Hārūn, al-Nābulusī implies that esoteric knowledge is more important than exoteric, but states this explicitly in the chapter on Mūsā. This is a profound statement on al-Nābulusī's part. Although he acknowledges that the friends of God and gnostics are servants of the religious age in which they live and must abide by the religious law of the messenger in whose message they believe, he questions this with his interpretation of the encounter between Mūsā and al-Khidr and the relationship between the functions of messenger, prophet and friend of God.

Al-Khidr is a prophet and friend of God. He is not a messenger conveying a divine message, unlike Mūsā and Hārūn. However, his esoteric knowledge concerning the next world is greater than the exoteric knowledge of Mūsā and Hārūn which concerns this world. Al-Nābulusī may be suggesting that if a figure such as al-Khidr has been given such an esoteric knowledge by God which is greater than that of a messenger of God, then another friend of God could be given the same kind of esoteric knowledge in the post-legislative prophetic age.

Conclusion

Al-Nābulusī's chapter on Hārūn appears to be an example of apologetics, whereby al-Nābulusī attempts to parry some of the polemical assaults on Ibn ʿArabī's ideas. It is known that a tradition evolved which used some of Ibn ʿArabī's statements

in his chapter on Hārūn in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* to assert that he was an unbeliever. Al-Nābulusī's comments on God's relationship with the tangible objects of worship of this world are an attempt to emasculate this polemical tradition.

However, al-Nābulusī does more than defend and apologise. He alters Ibn ʿArabī's basic themes quite substantially as well as introducing others, which are potentially more controversial. His remarks about the understanding of the object of worship reveal that he is willing to judge various forms of worship and declare some licit and others illicit. Although God may be worshipped in all of them, the understanding of a given worshipper determines the validity of the form and object of worship. This is an original thematic point.

Furthermore, al-Nābulusī introduces the theme of prophets, messengers and friends of God. Through his discussion of this theme, he discloses his ability to introduce new, yet related themes to those of Ibn ʿArabī. Al-Nābulusī uses this particular discussion to display his ideas on the relationship between the esoteric and exoteric. He holds that the esoteric is superior to the exoteric. There are a number of controversial implications of this.

Firstly, al-Nābulusī implies that figures such as al-Khidr, who are just prophets and friends of God, are superior to figures such as Mūsā and Hārūn, who are prophets and messengers. This superiority is due to their esoteric knowledge derived from gnosis. It is possible that al-Nābulusī is suggesting that Sufis, who are friends of God, also have access to this esoteric knowledge and thus are also superior to prophets qua messengers. Even if this were not his intention, he leaves himself open to this charge.

Furthermore, al-Nābulusī is not only suggesting that individuals such as al-Khidr, and perhaps also adept Sufis, are superior to prophets qua messengers, he is also stating that esoteric knowledge or gnosis is superior to and greater than exoteric legal knowledge. This is a highly controversial statement to make and moves beyond the arena of apologetics. Al-Nābulusī is putting forward his own views concerning religious knowledge and authority. He does agree with Ibn ʿArabī that this knowledge is veiled by the gnostic and constrained by exoteric religious norms, but, like Ibn ʿArabī, he contradicts this with the examples of Mūsā and Hārūn, al-Khidr and Mūsā, and his own writings concerning this subject. This knowledge is passed on and discussed. It is not veiled from others.

Not only does al-Nābulusī reveal his thematic creativity in this chapter, he also displays some of his skill in the use he makes of language and Qurʾānic exegesis. He associates the metaphysical concept of existence with the very concrete and physical imagery of Qurʾān 28:88 concerning God’s ‘face’, the end of the world, and the ultimate return of everything to God. He also associates the imagery of the sea of *walaya* with Qurʾān 18:60, which refers to the meeting point of ‘the two seas.’¹¹⁴ The seas represent the esoteric and exoteric bodies of knowledge. However, al-Nābulusī introduces Qurʾān 55:19-20 to affirm his belief that these two seas may meet but that there is an impassable barrier between them.

¹¹⁴ Admittedly, al-Nābulusī refers to the story of al-Khidr and Mūsā in Qurʾān 18 with a few citations in the chapter on Hārūn and then explores the imagery and themes of this story more thoroughly in

In juxtaposing various Qur'ānic verses from different and unrelated chapters of the Qur'ān, al-Nābulusī reveals an originality of association between Qur'ānic themes and imagery. This mode of exegesis itself may not be original, but he reveals in his commentary on Hārūn, and in the related commentary on Mūsā, a creative application.

the chapter on Mūsā. A comparison of pages 256 and 291 of the second part of al-Nābulusī's commentary reveals a striking similarity of themes and imagery.

CHAPTER 7

Mūsā

Introduction

The issue of Pharaoh's faith predates Ibn 'Arabī. Some mystics before his time, particularly al-Hallāj, meditated upon Pharaoh's controversial conversion.¹

However, it was to be the force of Ibn 'Arabī's writings that polarised views with regard to Pharaoh and his faith.

In the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Ibn 'Arabī's thesis is that Pharaoh's profession of faith was sound.² This attracted much comment, both in favour of and against his thesis.³

'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (d.973/1565) states that many allegations have been made against Ibn 'Arabī.⁴ He lists six of these, which it is reasonable to assume are important ones. The fourth in this list is the allegation that Ibn 'Arabī claimed that Pharaoh's faith is acceptable.⁵

¹ Wensinck, AJ, 'Fir'awn', in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1965), II, 917-8 (p.918).

² Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. by AA 'Affī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1980) I, 200-201 & 211-212.

³ See Knysh, AD, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition - the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 96, 106, 158-164, 214; and Ernst, CW, 'Controversies over Ibn Al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ*: The Faith of Pharaoh', *Islamic Culture*, 59iii (1985), 259-266.

⁴ Al-Sha'rānī, 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb al-Yawāqīt wa'l-Jawāhir fī Bayān 'Aqā'id al-Akābir* (Cairo: Būlāq, 1890), pp.13-14.

⁵ Al-Sha'rānī, *Kitāb al-Yawāqīt*, p.13.

Furthermore, a modern scholar has drawn attention to the importance of this theme in the polemics surrounding Ibn ʿArabī. In his seminal article on Ibn ʿArabī and his interpreters, James Morris refers to Michel Chodkiewicz's edition of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī's spiritual writings, which provides a valuable summary of three salient issues in the long controversy surrounding Ibn ʿArabī and the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. Morris states that the issue of Pharaoh's faith is principal among these three issues.⁶

Alexander Knysh describes the importance of both Ibn Taymiyya (d.728/1328) and al-Taftāzānī (d.791/1389 or 792/1390) in igniting the controversy of 'Pharaoh's Faith.'⁷ This issue is said to have become the pivot of al-Taftāzānī's criticism of how Ibn ʿArabī interpreted the Islamic tradition.⁸ Al-Taftāzānī's lasting influence upon subsequent generations of Muslim theologians ensured that his writings were read after his death.⁹ Knysh states that the next generation of critics consistently targeted their criticisms at Ibn ʿArabī's monistic ontology or at the Pharaoh issue, or both.¹⁰ Knysh shows how the polemic grew especially sharp in the 17th century, when Ibrāhīm b.

⁶ Morris, JW, 'Ibn ʿArabi and His Interpreters', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 107i (1987), 101-119 (p.115). Chodkiewicz, M, *Ecrits Spirituels by Emir Abd El-Kader* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982), pp.32-5.

⁷ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, pp.96, 106, 147-9, 158-164, 214; he states that al-Taftāzānī's criticism of Ibn ʿArabī displays many parallels with the antimonistic discourse first articulated by Ibn Taymiyya. Elder, EE, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam - Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), pp.ix, xx, & xxiii, explains how al-Ashʿarī (d.935) formulated the doctrinal position of orthodox Islam, although his disciples have not always followed his doctrinal views. Orthodox Kalām became a term wide enough to include many varying shades of doctrine. Thus, although al-Taftāzānī counted himself an Ashʿarite, he inclined to minimise conflicting positions. His treatise on the creed of al-Nasafī is a standard textbook on Muslim theology, being a compendium of the various views regarding the great doctrines of Islam.

⁸ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.158.

⁹ Elder, *A Commentary*, p.xx.

Hasan al-Kūrānī's (d.1101/1690) apology for Ibn ʿArabī's monistic philosophy provoked a massive stream of rejoinders that further fuelled the already heated debates about Ibn ʿArabī and his school. This scholastic controversy, ignited by Ibn Taymiyya and al-Taftāzānī, continued uninterrupted throughout the eighteenth century.¹¹

It is appropriate to view al-Nābulusī's arguments concerning Pharaoh's faith in this polemical context. It appears that only Ernst and Knysh have written specifically about this polemical debate. As a late 17th century commentator on the works of Ibn ʿArabī, al-Nābulusī's statements concerning Pharaoh's profession of faith are worthy of serious consideration, especially in view of the fact that al-Nābulusī and Ibn ʿArabī may be debating more than the issue of Pharaoh and the acceptability of his profession of faith. They may be struggling over a particular understanding of God and of Islam.¹²

Before examining al-Nābulusī's argument, a look at the polemical background to the issue of Pharaoh's profession of faith is relevant. This will provide a context in which to view the historical and polemical significance of al-Nābulusī's statements. There are three elements to this background that shall be surveyed: the Qur'ān; the views of a number of Qur'ānic exegetes; and Ibn ʿArabī's views.

¹⁰ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.163.

¹¹ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.164, states that the 18th century witnessed the growing acceptance of Ibn ʿArabī that was, in great part, facilitated by the work of such brilliant pro-Ibn ʿArabī scholars as al-Nābulusī amongst others.

¹² See the chapter on al-Nābulusī's introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, where there is a discussion of the issue of the authority of adept Sufis over less able people who are not graced with the same faith in and knowledge of God.

The Qur'ān

The dominant tone of the Qur'ān with regard to Pharaoh is that he is doomed to the fires of Hell. Wensinck suggests that the narrative of Pharaoh in the Qur'ān is like other such narratives in the Qur'ān.¹³ It is to be seen in relation to Muḥammad's own mission: the determined rejection of the divine message by the unbelievers who in the end are severely punished, while the believers among them are saved.¹⁴ Watt and Bell state that Pharaoh is sometimes referred to in the Qur'ān as an example of someone who suffered because he did not believe in God.¹⁵ However the punishment of Pharaoh is often just a side-issue, the main object being to give an account of Mūsā and the Children of Israel.¹⁶

The issue of Pharaoh's profession of faith, or lack of it, is based on Qur'ān 10:90-2. This narrates the fundamental Qur'ānic account. There are other verses in scattered parts of the Qur'ān which reveal different facets of the Qur'ānic story of Pharaoh. These allow the fullness of Pharaoh's story to be told. Qur'ān 10:90-2 states:

And we brought the Children of Israel across the sea. Pharaoh and his hosts followed them insolently and impetuously until, when overwhelmed with the flood, he said, 'I believe that there is no god but He in whom the Children of Israel believe. I am one of those that submit.' 'Now? And before you did rebel, being one of those that spread corruption. So, today we shall deliver you with your body, that you may be a sign to those after you. Indeed, many men are heedless of our signs.'

¹³ Wensinck, 'Fir'awn', p.917.

¹⁴ Wensinck, 'Fir'awn', p.917.

¹⁵ Watt, WM & Bell, R, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp.130-1.

¹⁶ Watt & Bell, *Introduction*, pp.130-1.

Among the Qur'ānic verses proclaiming the drowning of Pharaoh are the following:

He [Pharaoh] desired to startle them [the Children of Israel] from the land; and We drowned him and those with him, all together [Qur'ān 17:103].

Pharaoh followed them [the Children of Israel] with his hosts, but they were overwhelmed by the sea. So, Pharaoh had led his people astray, and was no guide to them [Qur'ān 20:78-9].

We delivered Mūsā and those with him all together. Then, We drowned the others [Qur'ān 26:66].

And he [Pharaoh] waxed proud in the land, he and his hosts, wrongfully. They thought they should not be returned to Us. Therefore, We seized him and his hosts, and cast them into the sea. So, behold how was the end of the evildoers! [Qur'ān 28:39-40].

So We seized him [Pharaoh] and his hosts, and We cast them into the sea, and he was blameworthy [Qur'ān 51:40].

From the above verses, it is evident that Pharaoh is drowned for chasing the Israelites with his army and also for being an evildoer who has led his own people astray. It is stated unequivocally that Pharaoh was to blame for this fate. The key verses here are Qur'ān 10:90-2, which constitute the pole around which the arguments for and against Pharaoh's faith revolve. These verses suggest that Pharaoh was too late in professing his faith in God whose signs and commands he had disobeyed and maligned in his lifetime. Thus, the Qur'ān does not seem to uphold the sincerity of his profession of belief. In harmony with this, that Pharaoh's fate in the next life is to be that of Hellfire appears in three other verses:

And We sent Mūsā with Our signs, and a manifest authority, to Pharaoh and his council. But they followed Pharaoh's command, and Pharaoh's command was not right-minded. He shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection, and will have led them down to the Fire - evil the watering-place to be led down to! And there was sent following them in this world a curse, and upon the Day of Resurrection - evil the offering place to be offered! [Qur'ān 11:96-99].

Therefore We seized him and his hosts, and cast them into the sea. So behold what was the end of the evildoers! And We appointed them leaders, calling to the Fire: and on the Day of Resurrection they shall not be helped. And We pursued them in this world with a curse, and on the Day of Resurrection they shall be among the spurned [Qur'ān 28:40-42].

Has the story of Mūsā reached you? When his Lord called to him in the holy valley, Tuwā: 'Go to Pharaoh. He has waxed insolent. And say, "Have you the will to purify thyself, and that I should guide you to your Lord so you should fear?" So he showed him the great sign, but he cried lies, and rebelled, then he turned away hastily, then he mustered and proclaimed, and he said, "I am your Lord, the Most High!" So God seized him with the chastisement of the Last World and the First. Surely in that is a lesson for him who fears!' [Qur'ān 79:15-26].

These last three citations suggest that Pharaoh is someone who disobeyed God and who ignored His signs. Consequently, he has become a figure of evil and corruption who will be in Hell in the next life and will be a beacon there calling others to the torments of his abode. There is no incontrovertible evidence for the proposition that Pharaoh became a true believer and was therefore delivered into the safety of heaven in the next life.

Qur'ānic Exegesis

The exegetes to be examined are al-Ṭabarī (d.923), al-Zamakhsharī (d.1143), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.1210), and al-Bayḍāwī (d.1286 or 1291).¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī states that Pharaoh's profession of faith in Qur'ān 10:90-2 was uttered when he was on the point of drowning and was certain of his death.¹⁸ From this he quotes various *ḥadīths*

¹⁷ Watt & Bell, *Introduction*, pp.168-70, state that the earliest important commentary on the Qur'ān which is extant and accessible is the work of al-Ṭabarī. The other commentaries of outstanding interest which they mention are those of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Bayḍāwī, al-Rāzī, and the concise *Jalālayn* written by al-Maḥallī and al-Ṣuyūṭī. Watt and Bell support the contention that the commentaries examined in the present chapter form a kind of overview of the exegetical tradition.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Egypt: Maimaniyya Press, 1321), XI, 103.

which relate to Pharaoh's apparent profession of faith.¹⁹ Save two, which simply add some flesh to the bare bones of the Qur'ānic verses, these are all variations on the story that the angel Jibrīl prevented Pharaoh from actually uttering his profession of faith and receiving God's mercy and forgiveness. Al-Ṭabarī simply presents these *ḥadīths* but does not comment on them.

However, he does appear to make a comment on the validity of Pharaoh's faith when the rejoinder to Pharaoh's profession of faith occurs. This rejoinder is: Now? When you were disobedient before and were one of the corrupt? [Qur'ān 10:91].

His comment is to ask rhetorically why Pharaoh left it so late to acknowledge God's rightful place.²⁰ Furthermore, he adds that before he was certain that he was to die, Pharaoh had all the time in the world to acknowledge God and, indeed, the opportunity for repentance was available to him too.²¹ This seems to imply that his declaration of faith is invalid since it was uttered at the moment he was certain of death. At that moment the opportunity was seemingly closed to him.²²

Al-Zamakhsharī states that Pharaoh's profession of faith was unacceptable.²³ He argues that Pharaoh uttered his profession three times in the desire for acceptance, however, if someone is in a condition of freely choosing faith and if they are also in a condition where the legal obligations are still binding, then only a single utterance of

¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XI, 104-5.

²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XI, 105.

²¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XI, 105.

²² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XI, 105.

²³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ at-Tanzīl wa-'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh at-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, n.d.), II, 367.

the profession of faith would suffice.²⁴ Pharaoh's profession of faith was unacceptable, al-Zamakhsharī argues, because his timing was wrong.²⁵ He professed faith when he had no other options and therefore his act was unacceptable. His timing was such that he was desperate for himself and had no other way out of his predicament. Thus, he was forced to profess faith and was not in a position to choose out of free will to do so.

Al-Zamakhsharī addresses the issue of Jibrīl preventing Pharaoh from professing his faith, which issue was also mentioned by al-Ṭabarī.²⁶ From al-Zamakhsharī's argument about the unacceptability of Pharaoh's faith, this question of Jibrīl preventing such a profession is a moot point. However, al-Zamakhsharī states that Jibrīl placed mud in Pharaoh's mouth for one reason. This was due to God's anger towards those who are ungrateful (*kāfir*) at the moment they realise that their faith is useless.²⁷ Al-Zamakhsharī stresses that Jibrīl's actions would not in themselves prevent someone from professing faith, since a dumb person can do so in his heart.²⁸ The faith of this type of person would be acceptable. Furthermore, he argues that Jibrīl did not do this so that Pharaoh might not receive God's mercy, rather, it was because God was already angry with Pharaoh.²⁹ If preventing God's mercy reaching Pharaoh had been Jibrīl's intention, then Jibrīl would have been ungrateful toward God

²⁴ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 367.

²⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 367.

²⁶ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 367. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XI, 104-5.

²⁷ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 367.

²⁸ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 367.

(*kāfir*) since hating the faith of someone who is ungrateful and wanting him to remain in ingratitude or unbelief are themselves the acts of an ungrateful person.³⁰

Finally, al-Zamakhsharī argues that Pharaoh chose his own fate. It is said that Jibrīl came to Pharaoh with a legal problem.³¹ This was that a man had a servant to whom he had been generous and whom he had raised in his household. However this servant had been ungrateful and denied his master's rights, and, furthermore, had claimed he himself was master. Jibrīl asked what should happen to this servant. Pharaoh said that the servant should be drowned in the sea. Thus, when Pharaoh was in the sea, it is said that Jibrīl quoted his own ruling on the earlier legal problem.³² Pharaoh's relationship to God is analogous to that of the servant and his master. His ingratitude to God was rewarded with drowning.³³

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's commentary on Qur'ān 10:90-2 is in the form of *responsae* literature. He proposes questions linked to a given issue and then provides answers, some simple, some complex. With regard to Pharaoh's profession of faith he cites two questions.

The first question concerns Pharaoh's ability to profess his faith while drowning.³⁴ This is answered quite simply by arguing that one can speak in one's

²⁹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 367.

³⁰ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 367.

³¹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 368.

³² Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 368.

³³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 368.

³⁴ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Commentary on the Qur'ān*, 6 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1278), III, 622.

heart and that such a manner of speaking is perfectly legitimate for the profession of faith.³⁵ Al-Rāzī appears to be in agreement with al-Zamakhsharī.

The second question deals with the issue of why Pharaoh's faith was not accepted by God when he professed it three times.³⁶ Furthermore, the question wonders how this profession of faith could not be accepted owing to God's anger when He is above such emotion.³⁷ These questions appear to be addressing the same argument for the unacceptability of Pharaoh's faith that al-Zamakhsharī proposes. Al-Rāzī does not disagree with al-Zamakhsharī, but simply adds a level of sophistication to the discussion.

Al-Rāzī suggests that the answer to this question has seven possible explanations.³⁸ The first explanation is that Pharaoh believed only when the moment of his punishment or drowning arrived. Such belief is unacceptable. The second explanation is that Pharaoh's faith was hypocritical since he was merely trying to escape the trauma of drowning. Such belief is unacceptable. The third explanation is that Pharaoh was simply copying the Israelites in uttering his profession of faith and thus had no knowledge of the god in which he supposedly believed. Such belief is unacceptable. The fourth explanation is that Pharaoh believed in the deity of the golden calf which some of the Israelites took to worshipping once they crossed the sea safely. Such belief is unacceptable. The fifth explanation is that Pharaoh believed in a deity which incarnates itself in creation which belief was held to be in the hearts of the

³⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 622.

³⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 622.

³⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 622.

³⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 622-3.

Israelites. Such belief is unacceptable. The sixth explanation is that Pharaoh did not profess that he believed that Mūsā was the messenger and prophet of God. Such belief is unacceptable. The seventh explanation concerns the legal issue that Jibrīl raised with Pharaoh. Pharaoh's answer to Jibrīl invalidates his profession of faith because he, by analogy, recommended his own punishment for his own sins.³⁹ Thus, such belief is unacceptable.⁴⁰

Al-Rāzī also addresses three questions concerning the rejoinder to Pharaoh's profession of faith in Qur'ān 10:90-1.⁴¹ The first question asks who the person is who utters the rejoinder to Pharaoh's profession of faith.⁴² For al-Rāzī the speaker was Jibrīl, however he acknowledges that there are those who say it was God.⁴³

The second question addresses the linguistic form of the rejoinder to Pharaoh's profession of faith.⁴⁴ The question queries whether non-acceptance of Pharaoh's repentance (*tawba*) for his previous sins and corruption prevents the acceptance of repentance in general.⁴⁵ Al-Rāzī argues that the acceptance of repentance is not obligatory by rational standards.⁴⁶ One of the proofs for this is said to be Qur'ān

³⁹ See earlier in this chapter for the details of Pharaoh recommending his own punishment.

⁴⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 622-3.

⁴¹ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁴² Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁴³ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁴⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁴⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁴⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

10:91.⁴⁷ However, the explanation of Pharaoh's unacceptable repentance takes into account both his past sins and his being one to spread corruption.⁴⁸

The third question concerns the issue of whether it was true that Jibrīl placed mud in Pharaoh's mouth to prevent him from repenting due to [God's] anger against him.⁴⁹ This may be an elaboration on al-Zamakhsharī's comments.⁵⁰ Al-Rāzī argues that it is more likely that such a statement about Jibrīl is not true.⁵¹ This is because the legal obligation (*taklīf*) upon Pharaoh in his condition was either permanent or transient.⁵² If it were permanent, then Jibrīl would be obliged to help him repent and not prevent him from doing so.⁵³ Furthermore, al-Rāzī points out that a dumb person can repent without actually uttering the words with his mouth and thus Jibrīl's actions toward Pharaoh would have been to no avail.⁵⁴ Equally, Jibrīl's actions would suggest that he was content with Pharaoh's remaining in ingratitude or unbelief (*kufr*) which would make Jibrīl ungrateful towards God and would also make God's exhortations to Mūsā and Hārūn to plead with Pharaoh in Qur'ān 20:44 pointless.⁵⁵ Al-Rāzī also argues that Jibrīl could not have performed these actions without God's command as

⁴⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁴⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁴⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁵⁰ See above.

⁵¹ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁵² Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁵³ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁵⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁵⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

in Qur'ān 19:64, 21:68, 21:27.⁵⁶ On the other hand, if the legal condition upon Pharaoh were transient, then Jibrīl's actions would have no use at all since Pharaoh's faith would have been hypocritical.⁵⁷

Finally, al-Baydāwī's comments on these verses are not as detailed and thorough as his predecessors. He states that when the time was right for the acceptance of his faith, Pharaoh turned away from it, yet when it was not accepted he went to extremes in proclaiming his faith.⁵⁸ Furthermore, al-Baydāwī adds that Pharaoh's profession of faith was unsound because of his despairing for himself and because of its occurrence at a time when he had no other choice open to him.⁵⁹ Al-Baydāwī argues that Pharaoh's faith was unacceptable.

The Qur'ān and four Qur'ānic exegetes thus appear to agree in arguing that Pharaoh's faith was unacceptable.⁶⁰ There is a consensus among the sources that Pharaoh's profession of faith was invalid because of the moment when it was made. He had no other option available to him since he was about to die. Thus, his faith was

⁵⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁵⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

⁵⁸ Al-Baydāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa-Asrār al-Ta'wīl* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-°Arabiyya al-Kubrā, 1330), III, 100.

⁵⁹ Al-Baydāwī, *Anwār*, III, 100.

⁶⁰ These four are just the tip of the iceberg. Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt Tafsīr Ṣūfī Kāmil li'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, ed. by Dr I Buyūnī (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-°Arabī li'l-Ṭibā'a wa'l-Nashr, n.d.), III, 113-5, argues that Pharaoh's faith was unacceptable. Al-Nasafī (d.1115), *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa-Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl* (Cairo: al-Ḥusainiyya, 1343), II, 133-4, also argues that Pharaoh's faith was unacceptable. Al-Baghawī (d.ca.1120), *Ma'ālīm al-Tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1987/1407), II, 366-7, implies that Pharaoh's faith was unacceptable. Ibn al-Jawzī (d.ca.1200), *Zād al-Masār fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr* (Damascus & Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī li'l-Ṭibā'a wa'l-Nashr, 1965/1385), IV, 59-62, implies that Pharaoh's faith was unacceptable. Al-Suyūṭī (d.1505), *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr al-Ma'thūr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-°Ilmiyya, 1990/1411), III, 568-70, implies that Pharaoh's faith was unacceptable.

that of desperation. Furthermore, certain commentators agree that nothing could have prevented Pharaoh from actually professing his faith at this time or at any other time. This means that there is no consensus upon the interpretation of the traditions concerning Jibrīl's placing mud in Pharaoh's mouth. Equally, the sudden deluge of sea water could not have prevented the profession of faith. However, the commentators agree that these issues are beside the point; the true point being that Pharaoh's faith was unacceptable above and beyond any part that the sea water or Jibrīl could have played.

Ibn 'Arabī and Pharaoh⁶¹

As Carl Ernst points out, Ibn 'Arabī's discussion of the faith of Pharaoh is almost in the nature of an aside in the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, which is devoted to Mūsā.⁶² Ibn 'Arabī discusses Pharaoh's profession of faith in two sections of the chapter on Mūsā. There is a brief discussion near the beginning and a longer one before the close of the chapter.⁶³ In both discussions his starting-points are Qur'ānic verses. He develops his argument concerning the validity of Pharaoh's

⁶¹ I have to thank Dr. Y.S. Dutton for an invaluable email discussion concerning Ibn 'Arabī's arguments in favour of Pharaoh's faith.

⁶² Ernst, 'Controversies', p.261.

⁶³ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 200-201 & 211-212.

profession of faith, drawing support from direct and indirect citations of Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīths*.⁶⁴

Ibn 'Arabī's argument is that Pharaoh's 'joy' was that God gave him belief at the time he was about to drown, and, because becoming a Muslim takes away all previous wrong actions, he died purified of all his sins. Ibn 'Arabī's scriptural starting-points are Qur'ān 28:9 and a *ḥadīth*:

And she [Pharaoh's wife] said to Pharaoh concerning Mūsā, 'He is a joy for me and you' [Qur'ān 28:9] ... And he was a joy for Pharaoh through faith (*īmān*) which God gave him at the moment of drowning. And so [God] took him pure and purified. There was no trace of badness in him because [God] took him at the moment of his faith before he could acquire any sins. 'Submission (*al-islām*) overcomes what was before it' [*ḥadīth*].⁶⁵

This implies that Pharaoh, thanks to God, became both a believer (*mu'min*) and one of those who submit (*muslim*) prior to his death.⁶⁶ This atoned for his previous sins. There was no time between his 'conversion' and his death for him to sin anew. God took him pure and purified of sin.

Ibn 'Arabī adds, alluding to Qur'ān 10:92, that:

He [God] made him [Pharaoh] a sign of His concern for those whom He wishes lest anyone despair of the mercy of God.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Qur'ān 28:9, Qur'ān 10:90-92, Qur'ān 12:87, Qur'ān 40:85, and Qur'ān 10:96-97; there are two *ḥadīths* alluded to by Ibn 'Arabī, but whose *isnāds* he does not provide. This suggests that Ibn 'Arabī is providing an exegesis of the Qur'ān in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

⁶⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 201.

⁶⁶ Izutsu, T, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), pp. 18 & 108, emphasises the importance of *īmān* and *islām*. He argues that the ethical relationship of man to God constitutes religion. This is found in two basic concepts: absolute trust in God (*islām wa-īmān*) and pious fear of God (*taqwā*). Furthermore, he argues that 'the structure of the ethics of the present world is determined by the ultimate (eschatological) and to which the present world (*al-dunyā*) is destined.'

⁶⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 201.

The exegetical tradition has been shown to argue that Qur'ān 10:92 states that Pharaoh is made into a sign for posterity so that people might learn that leading a sinful life and converting at the last moment in despair is of no avail.⁶⁸ Ibn 'Arabī does not recognise this interpretation of the Qur'ān in the chapter on Mūsā. This does not mean that he necessarily deems it invalid. He simply does not address it. He cites another Qur'ānic verse to elucidate his own interpretation of the validity of Pharaoh's profession of faith:

'No one despairs of God's soothing mercy except those who have no faith (*al-kāfirīn*)' [Qur'ān 12:87]. If Pharaoh were one of those who despair, he would not have rushed to faith.⁶⁹

Ibn 'Arabī has argued, in his own terms, that Pharaoh had faith (*īmān*) and submission to God (*islām*). Through the force of dialectic, he puts the case that since Pharaoh had faith, he could not have despaired of (*ya'isa min*) God's mercy. According to Qur'ān 12:87, only unbelievers despair of God's mercy. Pharaoh was not an unbeliever (*kāfir*), and so did not despair. The roots of this argument are Qur'ānic, but cannot be said to develop obviously in the manner proposed by Ibn 'Arabī.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ See the earlier discussion about the Qur'ān and its exegesis.

⁶⁹ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 201. This implicitly recognises the thrust of the earlier Qur'ānic exegetes with regard to Pharaoh's faith and parries it.

⁷⁰ Ibn 'Arabī appears to be addressing issues already extant in exegetical material by his time. In the *tafāṣīr* surveyed in this chapter which predated Ibn 'Arabī, that is to say those of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qushayrī, al-Nasafī, al-Baghawī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn al-Jawzī and al-Rāzī, there is support for the view that Pharaoh's profession of faith was unacceptable because it was too little, too late. Pharaoh sought an escape from his predicament out of despair. They all question the sincerity of his

Towards the end of the chapter on Mūsā, Ibn ʿArabī returns to the issue of Pharaoh's faith. He now addresses the issue of the benefits of Pharaoh's profession of faith. Although Pharaoh professed belief in God, this did not prevent him from dying. Ibn ʿArabī explains that finding faith will not prevent death in this world.⁷¹ This only happened to the people of Yūnus according to the Qur'ān. Ibn ʿArabī alludes to Qur'ān 10:98, which explains that it was only these people who had had their punishment lifted from them in this life when they found faith. He links this Qur'ānic allusion to Qur'ān 40:85:

'Their faith did not benefit them when they saw Our strength. [This is] God's custom which has reached His servants' [Qur'ān 40:85].⁷² [Faith has thus not benefited anyone in this life] except the people of Yūnus. However, this does not indicate that it [their faith] would not benefit them in the next life. ... And that does not lift death from them in this world. Thus He took Pharaoh despite his faith.⁷³

Ibn ʿArabī is stating that Pharaoh's faith had no efficacy in this life, only in the next. This counters the arguments found in the exegetical tradition to the effect that his faith was that of despair and thus not valid. Ibn ʿArabī is arguing that his faith would not have had any effect upon his chances of holding on to life. The efficacy of

profession of faith. See, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, XI, 103-5; al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if*, III, 113-5; al-Nasafī, *Madārik*, II, 133-4; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim*, II, 366-7; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 367; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, IV, 59-62; and al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 622.

⁷¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 211.

⁷² It has already been mentioned how Ibn ʿArabī appears to be addressing issues already extant in exegetical material by his time. In al-Rāzī's exegesis of Qur'ān 10:90-2, it is striking that in answering a question concerning the acceptability of Pharaoh's faith, he states that the situation in which Pharaoh found himself rendered his repentance and profession of faith unacceptable. He states that it is because of this that God revealed Qur'ān 40:85. His interpretation of Qur'ān 40:85 is at odds with Ibn ʿArabī's and it is notable that Ibn ʿArabī uses this same verse in supporting his own argument concerning the efficacy of Pharaoh's faith. See, al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 621-4.

faith in this life is not linked to its validity. He believes that there is Qur'ānic support for this view.

Furthermore, he maintains that this issue is valid only if Pharaoh were certain of dying at that moment.⁷⁴ If this were true, then he would have been in despair. Having already shown how he understands that this despair has no effect on the efficacy or validity of his faith, Ibn 'Arabī maintains that despair is not relevant anyway. He argues:

He [Pharaoh] was not certain of dying, because he saw the believers walking on the dry path which appeared when Mūsā's staff struck the sea. Pharaoh was not certain of death when he believed, contrary to the one who is in the throes of death.⁷⁵

Ibn 'Arabī maintains that although Pharaoh professed his faith while certain of salvation and that although he was indeed saved, this was not according to how he wanted to be saved.⁷⁶ Ibn 'Arabī implies that Pharaoh wanted to be saved from death in the sea. However, he states that God saved his soul from the punishment of the next life and saved his body from being lost in the waters of the sea.⁷⁷ He quotes Qur'ān 10:92 to support the latter aspect of Pharaoh's salvation:

Today We save you with your body so that you might be a sign for those after you.⁷⁸

⁷³ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 211.

⁷⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 211-2.

⁷⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 211-2.

⁷⁶ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 212.

⁷⁷ It is possible that Ibn 'Arabī is being ambiguous over whether Pharaoh actually died or not. He argues that both his body and soul were saved from the drowning. It is implied that the body was lifeless and that the soul was sent to the next world, but this is not certain.

⁷⁸ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 212.

The final element of Ibn ʿArabī's interpretation of Pharaoh's faith is a variation on another Qur'ānic verse:

'He against whom the word of punishment in the next life has been verified, will not believe even if every sign were to come to him until they [sic] see the painful punishment, that is to say: they taste the punishment of the next life' [Qur'ān 10:96-97]. Pharaoh was not a member of this category.⁷⁹

This supports Ibn ʿArabī's contention that although Pharaoh suffered in this life despite his profession of faith, his faith will obviate any suffering in the next life. After all, according to the above citation, it is only those who do not believe at all while in this life who will be punished in the next one. Ibn ʿArabī concludes from this that Pharaoh was not one of those who will be punished in the next life.

Ibn ʿArabī's final comment on this issue is that for him this is all apparent in the Qur'ān. However, he leaves this matter to God, since the majority of people (*ʿāmmat al-khalq*) are certain of Pharaoh's wretchedness. Ibn ʿArabī comments that these people have no reliable text for their belief concerning Pharaoh. The implication is that, unlike these people, Ibn ʿArabī does have something reliable and has used it in his preceding analysis of the validity of Pharaoh's faith.⁸⁰ His final position on this matter is:

⁷⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 212.

⁸⁰ It may be the case that Ibn ʿArabī means that his arguments are as good as those of the majority of people. Nevertheless, Ibn ʿArabī is vague about what he relies upon for his statements concerning Pharaoh. This is in contrast to al-Nābulusī who is willing to admit that he relies upon mystical insight (*dhawq*). See the chapter on al-Nābulusī's introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, which discusses the issue of what gives the adept Sufis their mystical knowledge.

Know that God does not take anyone except as a believer (*mu'min*), that is to say: someone who holds as true (*muṣaddiq*) what the divine revelations have brought. And I mean [God does not take anyone] among those who are in the throes of death [except as a believer].⁸¹

Al-Nābulusī and Pharaoh

Al-Nābulusī summarises his own understanding of the story of Pharaoh:

Pharaoh lived his life in this world right from the start as a godless person (*fāsiq*), a libertine (*fājir*), an unbeliever (*kāfir*), as someone led astray and someone who leads others astray. He claimed lordship alongside God. He fought God, His prophets, and His messengers. But then he believed and submitted. This was accepted. God forgave him all the evil that he had done, visiting death upon him when he was pure and purified. God spares all those who have reached the extreme of wretchedness through committing many sins and abominations. That is to say [He saves] those, who, all their life, have immersed themselves in varieties of unbelief (*kufr*) and atheism (*zandaqa*), and who have gone to great lengths in error (*ḍalāl*) so that they have done all that Pharaoh did, if not more if that were possible, and then have submitted, believed and repented in their heart and mind with sincerity in turning from all that they were before. God accepts his submission, faith, and repentance, even if that came from him in the last few moments of his life before his death. [This is] so that no creature despairs of the mercy of God.⁸²

This is al-Nābulusī's argument in brief. God had Pharaoh drowned despite his profession of faith and the soundness of its acceptance, and of its benefit for him in the next life.⁸³ Al-Nābulusī explains and supports this with the theory that all faith that occurs in this life is accepted, although it may not save someone from punishment in this life:

Thus, God had Pharaoh drowned in the sea despite his faith, the soundness of its acceptance, and its benefit for him in the next life, because every faith that is produced in this life is acceptable on the part of its possessor, although it may not save him from punishment that is occurring.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥkam*, I, 212.

⁸² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, 2 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1304-1323), II, 301.

⁸³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

⁸⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

Al-Nābulusī states that the soundness of Pharaoh's faith and its acceptance is clear in the Qur'ān, and that nothing in the prophetic traditions nor in *ijmā'* rejects it.⁸⁵

He adds that:

God had Pharaoh killed pure of badness or unbelief (*kufṛ*), that is to say as a believer and as a Muslim with a faith and submission (*islām*) confirmed in the Qur'ān. One ought to believe in and hold as true the Qur'ān since no-one is more truthful than God.⁸⁶ ... Pharaoh died at the moment that he found faith and submission to God with a sincere and truthful heart.⁸⁷

The widespread quotation of various elements of the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and *ijmā'* as support for his arguments is notable in his commentary on the issue of Pharaoh's faith.⁸⁸ This suggests the extent to which al-Nābulusī views himself and the sources of Islamic tradition as agreeing with Ibn 'Arabī's ideas concerning Pharaoh's faith.

Al-Nābulusī establishes an argument of scholarly authority to support his claims about Pharaoh's profession of faith. He states that a group of *mujtahidūn* have also spoken about the soundness of Pharaoh's faith.⁸⁹ These are said to appear at the

⁸⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300.

⁸⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277.

⁸⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 378.

⁸⁸ Qur'ān 2:24, 2:132, 3:29, 5:2, 6:28, 6:93, 7:137, 9:118, 10:90-2 [Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī], 10:96-98 [Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī], 11:96-99, 12:87 [Ibn 'Arabī], 19:64, 20:10-12, 20:27-28, 20:44, 20:56-7, 20:79, 21:27-8, 21:98, 26:5, 28:9 [Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī], 28:10 [Ibn 'Arabī], 28:34, 28:39-42, 29:65, 39:19, 40:46 (both an allusion & a quotation, which is at variance with the original Qur'ān), 40:85 [Ibn 'Arabī], 66:6, 79:25. Al-Nābulusī cites nine *ḥadīths*, drawn from a number of collections including those of: Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Mājah, al-Ḥākim, al-Bayhaqī, al-Ṭabarānī, Abū Nu'aim, al-Bukhārī, and Muslim.

⁸⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300. He neither defines what he understands by the term *mujtahid* nor gives examples of who these are. In the absence of other factors, it should probably be understood as referring to those who devote themselves to a given activity. In the present context this activity is the understanding of the Qur'ān.

beginning of °Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha°rāwī's book, *al-Yawāqīl*, and that one of these *mujtahidūn* is Ibn °Arabī.⁹⁰

Building upon this argument of scholarly authority, al-Nābulusī explains that adept Sufis (*ahl al-kashf wa 'l-baṣīra (...) wa-aṣḥāb al-qulūb al-muhadhdhaba bi 'l-riyāḍa al-shar°iyya*) have no doubts whatsoever about any issue at all, including that of Pharaoh's faith.⁹¹ They are, however, constrained by the era in which they live.⁹² They may not be able to express their understanding of the truth of all these issues in a public manner. Indeed, it is argued that in their attempts to teach those who are exotericists, they are limited by factors such as language (*lafz*) and the field of

⁹⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300. Al-Sha°rāwī, at the beginning of *Kitāb al-Yawāqīl*, states that Ibn °Arabī is one of a group of *mujtahidūn* who speak about the soundness of Pharaoh's faith. However, he does not give the name of any other *mujtahid*. Furthermore, he states that Ibn °Arabī's discussion of the soundness of Pharaoh's faith is in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, whereas in the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, which was written only three years before his death, Pharaoh's faith is said to be not accepted and that he is doomed to Hell. See Al-Sha°rāwī, *Kitāb al-Yawāqīl*, p.13. Ibn °Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. by O Yahya, 4 vols (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-°Arabiyya, 1975), pp.393 & 403, states that there are four groups in Hell and they will not leave. One of these groups contains Pharaoh and those like him who claim to be lords and deny this of God. Although this contradicts Ibn °Arabī's statements in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* with regard to the soundness of Pharaoh's profession of faith and of his spiritual salvation, he does add that one of the four groups of permanent inhabitants of Hell will lose the sensation of pain in Hell after a certain period of time. This is due to the grace and mercy of God. He does not say that this is the group containing Pharaoh, however he does not say that it is not either. It is clear that al-Sha°rāwī makes a valid point that the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* contradicts the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* on the issue of Pharaoh's faith. This raises awkward issues about Ibn °Arabī's stance concerning Pharaoh, which issues are not the subject of the present thesis. What is important, as discussed above, is that elements of the later Islamic tradition understood Ibn °Arabī to have defended Pharaoh's profession of faith and criticised him for it. That al-Nābulusī entered this polemic by defending the soundness of Pharaoh's profession of faith is significant.

⁹¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301. See the chapter on al-Nābulusī's introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, which discusses his views on the authority invested in those who receive mystical insight (*dhawq*) of God.

⁹² See the chapter on Hārūn with regard to prophets, messengers, and saints. See also, al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 264.

theology (*kalām*).⁹³ However, when they address themselves or others like them, they are only limited, or rather freed, by sound revelation (*kashf*) and mystical insight (*dhawq*).⁹⁴ What is important in this context is that al-Nābulusī's stated intention is not to address adept Sufis like himself, rather aspiring acolytes and those who have misunderstood the Sufis.⁹⁵ It appears that he, unlike earlier Sufis, is not constrained by these factors at all.⁹⁶ Al-Nābulusī's only constraint may be the need to defend Ibn ʿArabī.

From his initial premise that Pharaoh's profession of faith was sound and that it was accepted by God, al-Nābulusī proceeds to explain that Pharaoh's abode in the next life is heaven and not hell, since this is guaranteed by his faith. This is a logical outcome from the position that all faith which occurs in this life is valid, although it may not save a person from punishment in this life.⁹⁷ The implication of this is that faith found in this life will benefit someone in the next life. This believer will be delivered from everlasting punishment in the Hereafter.⁹⁸ However, al-Nābulusī is

⁹³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301.

⁹⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301.

⁹⁵ See chapter on al-Nābulusī's introduction to the *Sharḥ*.

⁹⁶ In his *tafsīr* on the Qur'ān, al-Qushayrī does not vindicate Pharaoh or put forward arguments for the validity of Pharaoh's faith. Rather, he follows what appears to be the orthodox line - that Pharaoh was damned and that his profession of faith was too little, too late. Al-Nābulusī would probably argue that he was constrained by language and *kalām*, and could not express the truths to which he no doubt had access. See al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if*, III, 113-4. I have to thank Y. Dutton for pointing out this reference.

⁹⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

⁹⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300, where al-Nābulusī argues that Pharaoh is not condemned to everlasting torment. See the section later in this chapter on Pharaoh's ultimate fate.

careful to state that faith which is produced only in the next life is unacceptable according to *ijmāʿ*.⁹⁹

While arguing for Pharaoh's profession of faith, al-Nābulusī responds to the major issues which have been shown to spring from the Qur'ānic exegetical literature. These revolve predominantly around the issue of faith out of desperation and the issue of Jibrīl attempting to prevent Pharaoh from repenting and becoming a believer. Al-Nābulusī attempts to counter the validity of both of these issues. He recognises both of them explicitly:

He [Pharaoh] believed and submitted desiring to join them [the Israelites] and hoping for safety and salvation from drowning, but not despairing for his life; and some have stated that the faith of desperation is unacceptable.¹⁰⁰ ... The *ḥadīth* mentioned by al-Baghawī in *al-Maṣābīḥ* and by others to the effect that Jibrīl took some sea-mud and put it in Pharaoh's mouth so that he might not repent is not sound.¹⁰¹

From an examination of al-Nābulusī's text, it is clear that the issue of Pharaoh's faith revolves around competing interpretations of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*.¹⁰² Al-Nābulusī's understanding of the Qur'ān is fundamentally different to that of the earlier exegetes, although it appears to be not markedly different to Ibn

⁹⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300. Izutsu, T. *God and Man in the Koran - Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), p.131, argues that God watches over man's entire life from his birth in this world to his fate in the next. He states that in the Qur'ānic Weltanschauung, this world (*al-dunyā*) covers man's birth and death and thereafter until the Hour (*al-sāʿa*) comes. The next world (*al-ākhirā*) begins with the onset of the Hour and goes on for eternity without end.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 276.

¹⁰¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277.

¹⁰² This is also clear from a reading of Ibn ʿArabī's treatment of Pharaoh's faith. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.159, notes that 'due to the conflicting interpretations of the issue [of Pharaoh's faith] by the different schools of law, legal niceties form the centrepiece of al-Taftāzānī's [d.1389] criticism of the concept of Pharaoh's faith.'

‘Arabī’s. His arguments cover the main points raised by earlier Qur’ānic commentators and the thrust of these arguments is an attempt to obviate criticisms of Pharaoh’s profession of faith.

Arguments for the Acceptability of Pharaoh’s Faith

Motivation for Pharaoh’s Profession of Faith

Al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn ‘Arabī that Mūsā is to be a joy or perpetual delight for Pharaoh through faith.¹⁰³ This may mean that Mūsā’s effect upon Pharaoh is to be Pharaoh’s eventual profession of faith. Al-Nābulusī provides a specific definition of faith (*īmān*):

Faith [is] submission (*idh‘ān*) and holding as true (*taṣdīq*) the religion of Mūsā, his being a prophet (*nubuwwatan*) and a messenger (*risālatan*).¹⁰⁴

In al-Rāzī’s *tafsīr* on Qur’ān 10:90-2 one of the reasons why Pharaoh’s faith was unacceptable was that he stated that he believed in the God of the Israelites but that he did not acknowledge Mūsā’s being a prophet and a messenger.¹⁰⁵ Al-Nābulusī contradicts this here by placing such an acknowledgement in the mouth of Pharaoh. He does not provide any scriptural or even non-scriptural support for this statement.

Both Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Nābulusī agree that it was God who gave Pharaoh faith when he was about to drown and that Pharaoh accepted this faith when he witnessed the death around him and that Mūsā and the Israelites had escaped through the grace

¹⁰³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277. Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 201.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 276.

of their faith and submission.¹⁰⁶ What they agree upon here is the crux of the issue of the acceptability of Pharaoh's faith in the context of the exegetical tradition. Both al-Nābulusī and Ibn ʿArabī are arguing that Pharaoh was not desperate for his life when he proclaimed his belief. Nevertheless, both of them still argue that even if he were desperate for his life at that moment, his faith would still have been acceptable. Al-Nābulusī states:

[Pharaoh] believed and submitted out of desire (*tamʿ*) to join them [the Israelites] and out of hope (*rajaʾ*) for safety and escape from drowning, and not out of despair (*yaʿs*) for life; some have stated that the faith of desperation (*īmān al-yaʿs*) is unacceptable.¹⁰⁷

From the earlier discussion of the exegetical tradition on Qurʾān 10:90-2, it appears that al-Nābulusī may be referring in the above citation to the Qurʾānic exegetes who claim that Pharaoh's profession of faith was unacceptable because it was out of desperation for his life. Al-Nābulusī refutes this strongly.¹⁰⁸ He is clearly stating that Pharaoh was not desperate for his life, rather he desired to join the Israelites and hoped to escape drowning. Pharaoh was not a man who thought that he was about to die. He willingly proclaimed faith in God.

Furthermore, although his profession of faith was accepted, Pharaoh still drowned in the flood. Al-Nābulusī explains:

¹⁰⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 622.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 276. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 201 & 211-2.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 276.

¹⁰⁸ Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, p.159. Knysh recognises that Ibn ʿArabī's original argument concerning Pharaoh's faith may be grounded in legal theory since the Shāfiʿī view concerning 'faith embraced in peril (*ḥāl al-yaʿs*)' was that it should be considered valid. However, neither Ibn ʿArabī, al-Nābulusī, nor the Qurʾānic exegetes refer explicitly to this Shāfiʿī view. Furthermore, Knysh does not give any references to support his contention about this 'Shāfiʿī view'.

But his death had come and his life was complete. God does not delay [taking] a soul if its time (*ajal*) has come.¹⁰⁹

Pharaoh had to die, but he did so at a moment when he had embraced faith and had submitted to God. He had become pure and purified of badness and sins. For al-Nābulusī, this is all confirmed in the Qur'ān which every Muslim must regard as the true word of God.¹¹⁰ In saying this, al-Nābulusī is supporting an alternative interpretation of the Qur'ān to those of most of the earlier exegetes.

Al-Nābulusī, like Ibn 'Arabī, returns to the issue of whether Pharaoh's faith was that of desperation or not later in the commentary.¹¹¹ He argues that his profession of faith, whether out of desperation or out of desire, was acceptable. Both Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī agree that Qur'ān 40:85 and Qur'ān 10:96-8, which discuss the benefits of faith for those who heeded the warnings of their prophets too late, do not deny the benefit of faith when punishment is due. Only the people of Yūnus benefited in this life, and only for a time. However, Qur'ān 40:85 explicitly states that the proclamation of faith when God's punishment is witnessed is of no benefit whatsoever. This verse seems to contradict everything that Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī are claiming.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277. The inevitability of death is a Qur'ānic theme, viz. Qur'ān 3:145 & 10:49.

¹¹⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277.

¹¹¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299-300.

¹¹² Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 622, when explaining that Pharaoh's faith is unacceptable because it is found in a moment of desperation and thus his repentance is unacceptable too, cites Qur'ān 40:85 as support for the non-benefit of his faith. Ibn 'Arabī, who also cites Qur'ān 40:85 and combines it with Qur'ān 10:98 may be responding to positions like that of al-Rāzī on Pharaoh's faith. Al-Ṭabarī,

Al-Nābulusī agrees with Ibn ʿArabī that the issue here is the benefit of faith in this life, not in the next life. Al-Nābulusī provides a comprehensive argument to this end. He cites all of Qurʾān 10:98 which explains that the people of Yūnus benefited from their faith in this life since God took away the threat of punishment from them during their lifetime.¹¹³ However, he states that it does not follow that faith found in a moment of desperation will have no benefit in the next life. He argues that neither Qurʾān 40:85 nor Qurʾān 10:98 exclude the possibility that faith, although of no benefit in averting punishment in this life, will be of benefit in the next life in taking away the spectre of everlasting torment and punishment.¹¹⁴

Al-Nābulusī raises a sub-argument for support, which Ibn ʿArabī does not raise at all. He argues that, according to the Qurʾān, the faith of desperation was acceptable among the Israelites at the time of Mūsā and before. It is implied that it is anachronistic to judge Pharaoh's faith other than by the standards of the religion in which he chose to believe:

The creed (*milla*) of the children of Israel in which state Pharaoh died when he drowned was 'that there is no god save that in which the children of Israel believe and I am one of those who submit' [Qurʾān 10:90]. This was the counsel of Ibrāhīm and Yaʿqūb for faith at the moment of death: 'Ibrāhīm and Yaʿqūb counselled their sons with it, "My sons! God has chosen for you the religion so do not die except as submitters" [Qurʾān 2:132].' The sentence is a *ḥāl*. The *ḥāl* is in a simultaneous state (*muqārin li*) to death. Thus, faith of desperation was acceptable in the creed of the children of Israelites.¹¹⁵

Jāmiʿ, XXIV, 52-3, concurs with al-Rāzī's understanding of Qurʾān 40:85. This is also the case with: al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif*, v, 317-8; al-Nasafī, *Madārik*, IV, 66; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim*, IV, 106; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, VII, 238; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, IV, 183; al-Bayḍawī, *Anwār*, v, 43-4; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, v, 670-1.

¹¹³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

¹¹⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

¹¹⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

Al-Nābulusī displays a particular exegetical style here. He chooses an appropriate verse relating to the children of Israel from within the Qur'ān which can be shown to have relevance to the issue of Pharaoh. He interprets the verse grammatically in order to reveal that the Qur'ān makes the act of submitting to God simultaneous with the moment of dying. This supports the argument that the faith of desperation was not unacceptable among the Israelites, but rather positively encouraged by both Ibrāhīm and Ya'qūb.¹¹⁶ This appears to be another response to the exegetical literature on Qur'ān 10:90-2 which universally invalidates such faith.

Both al-Nābulusī and Ibn 'Arabī argue that Pharaoh was not desperate for his life when he professed belief. Nevertheless, both of them have presented arguments to the effect that even if he were desperate for his life at that moment, his faith would still have been acceptable. Al-Nābulusī puts forward the evidence for Pharaoh not being in

¹¹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 1, 417, states that this advice means that the Israelites should not depart from their religion or, rather, their Islam, during their life since they do not know when they are to die. Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if*, 1, 139-40, does not comment on this aspect of the verse. Al-Nasafī, *Madārik*, 1, 59-60, paraphrases this aspect of the verse, explaining that it states that one should only die in the state of being confirmed in one's Islam. Al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālīm*, 1, 118-9, adds that it can also say that one should not die except as a believer (*mu'min*) and as sincere (*mukhlis*). He defines being a Muslim as thinking well of one's Lord. Furthermore, he states that one should remain a Muslim all one's life so that whenever death comes, one is a Muslim. Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1, 191-2, repeats al-Nasafī's comments verbatim, but adds that the point is that to die not in a state of adherence to Islam is a baleful death and that this is not the death of someone who is felicitous. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, 1, 148-9, paraphrases the original imploring that one should adhere to Islam so that when death comes, it finds one as a Muslim. Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, 1, 516-7, explains that counselling is a more positive word than ordering. As such, counselling in the face of fear or death and at that moment is a stronger and more complete care on the part of man for his religion. He states that this counsel is an exhortation to come to Islam since man does not know when death will come to him. Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār*, 1, 190, restates al-Zamakhsharī, and by implication al-Nasafī. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, 1, 256, echoes al-Baghawī in defining being a Muslim as thinking well of one's Lord. None of these *tafāsīr*

a state of desperation. He has already stated that Pharaoh found belief out of desire and hope, not out of desperation.¹¹⁷ Pharaoh is said to have seen the Israelites, the believers in God, crossing the sea safely.¹¹⁸ He was thus sure of his survival when he believed.¹¹⁹ Thus, Pharaoh was not in the throes of death when he believed, rather he thought he would still live.¹²⁰

Both Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī explain that events played out as Pharaoh believed they would, but not quite in the manner he wanted.¹²¹ It has already been shown above how al-Nābulusī supports and explains the position that Pharaoh's soul was saved from the torment of the next life through the acceptance of his last-minute profession of belief. However, according to Qur'ān 10:92, Pharaoh's body was also saved from the flood. Both Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī argue that this was in order that Pharaoh's people might not arrive at theories of occultation to explain his disappearance.¹²² His body was a sign for them not to believe in Pharaoh as a deity.

Al-Nābulusī's final comment is:

And salvation or safety encompassed him [Pharaoh] physically in his body and spiritually in his soul through his faith.¹²³

make the point that al-Nābulusī makes - that the act of becoming a Muslim is simultaneous with death, thus justifying the faith of desperation.

¹¹⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 276.

¹¹⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

¹¹⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

¹²⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299.

¹²¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 299-300. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 211-2.

¹²² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 212.

¹²³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300.

It is clear from the earlier survey of *tafāsīr*, that many important Qur'ānic exegetes viewed Pharaoh's profession of faith as an act of desperation and thus unacceptable.¹²⁴ A further issue related to the rejection of Pharaoh's proclamation of faith emerges from a number of the Qur'ānic exegetes. This is the story of Jibrīl placing sea-mud in Pharaoh's mouth to prevent him from repenting and professing his faith.¹²⁵ It appears from those exegetes that mention this story that it is superfluous to the point about desperation. They already regard Pharaoh's faith as unacceptable because it is too little, too late.

Jibrīl's Role in Pharaoh's Profession of Faith

Al-Nābulusī, having dealt with the issue of desperation or, rather, the issue of timing, tackles the issue of Jibrīl's intervention in the story of Pharaoh's faith.¹²⁶ There are two distinct elements to al-Nābulusī's argument. Firstly, he states that the whole story of Pharaoh finding faith just before he dies is a divine sign for posterity that no-

¹²⁴ See above.

¹²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, II, 103-6, cites nine versions of the *ḥadīth* about Jibrīl, making no comment on them. Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if*, III, 113-4, does not mention these *ḥadīths*. Al-Nasafī, *Madārik*, II, 133-4, does not mention these *ḥadīths*. Al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālīm*, II, 366-7, mentions the story of Jibrīl, making no comment. Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 366-9, mentions the story of Jibrīl, accepting it, but qualifying it. He holds that Jibrīl put mud in Pharaoh's mouth owing to God's anger with the unbeliever who seeks belief when it will not benefit him. He categorically refutes that Jibrīl did this for fear that God's mercy might reach Pharaoh. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the faith of a dumb person who professes it in his heart is sound. Secondly, whoever hates the new-found faith of an unbeliever and wants him to remain in unbelief is himself an unbeliever. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, IV, 59-62, mentions the story of Jibrīl approvingly, adding that Jibrīl's intention was that God might not forgive Pharaoh. Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 621-4, mentions the story of Jibrīl, stating that it is probably unsound. Al-Nābulusī quotes al-Rāzī on this issue. Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār*, III, 99-100, does not mention these *ḥadīths*. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, III, 568-70, mentions these *ḥadīths*. All those *mufasssīrūn* who mention these *ḥadīths*, except al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, also mention that Jibrīl's intention was to deprive Pharaoh of God's mercy. Some even state that God was more angry with Pharaoh than Jibrīl.

one should despair of God's mercy.¹²⁷ He examines the *ḥadīths* concerning Jibrīl attempting to prevent Pharaoh's repentance and faith connected with this. He states unequivocally:

The *ḥadīth* that al-Baghawī in his *al-Maṣābīḥ* and others mention to the effect that Jibrīl took some sea-mud and put it in Pharaoh's mouth so that he might not repent is not sound.¹²⁸

For support, he cites a lengthy extract from al-Rāzī's (d.1210) *tafsīr* on this issue.¹²⁹ Al-Rāzī argues that it is more likely that such an action on Jibrīl's part is not sound.¹³⁰

Al-Nābulusī has chosen the one *tafsīr* which refutes categorically the *ḥadīths* concerning Jibrīl's intervention in the final moments of Pharaoh's life. He quotes al-Rāzī out of context, probably because al-Rāzī does not ultimately accept the soundness of Pharaoh's faith. However, al-Rāzī does analyse the evidence for his own position, which leads to a refutation of the Jibrīl stories. His work is thus of use to al-Nābulusī. Al-Nābulusī gives the impression that al-Rāzī may agree with his own overall position, whereas these two scholars actually disagree over the soundness of Pharaoh's profession of faith.

¹²⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277-8.

¹²⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277. The chapter on Zakariyyā examines the concept of divine mercy in the thought of al-Nābulusī and Ibn ʿArabī. This mercy functions on an ethical and ontological level. It is God's mercy which bestows existence to every thing, including mercy itself. In this light the story of Pharaoh's proclamation of faith can be seen from both perspectives of mercy. Ethically, no-one should despair of mercy since it is bestowed to everyone. Ontologically, no-one should despair of mercy since everyone and everything is existent and thus in receipt of ontological mercy.

¹²⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277.

¹²⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277. The extract comes from al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623.

¹³⁰ See above.

The *tafāsīr* surveyed earlier in this chapter indicate that the *mufasssīrūn* who mention the Jibrīl *ḥadīths*, except al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, also mention that Jibrīl's intention was to deprive Pharaoh of God's mercy. Some even state that God was more angry than Jibrīl with Pharaoh. Al-Nābulusī appears to respond to this in the second element of his treatment of the Jibrīl stories.¹³¹ He cites two *ḥadīths* from the traditionist Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī (d.892): they both highlight the fact that Jibrīl's intention was to prevent God's mercy reaching Pharaoh.¹³²

Al-Nābulusī explains what is meant by these *ḥadīths*. In doing this, he also explains the use made of these *ḥadīths* and similar ones by the exegetical tradition on Qur'ān 10:90-2. He argues that what is meant, if it is true that Jibrīl actually placed mud in Pharaoh's mouth, is that:

[It was] out of fear that mercy might reach him ... in this life and so survive being drowned and thereby either become a problem for the Israelites or return to his state of unbelief.¹³³

To this end, al-Nābulusī quotes Qur'ān 6:28:

If they were returned, they would return to what they were forbidden.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277.

¹³² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277. He states that one of them is *ḥasan*, that is fair or acceptable in the absence of superior accounts, while the other is *ḥasan gharīb ṣaḥīḥ*, that is a fair account promoted one grade owing to a number of parallel reports which are sound. His interpolation of 'strange' is curious. See Burton, J, *An Introduction to the Hadith* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1994), p.111.

¹³³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277.

¹³⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278. Al-Nābulusī is citing a Qur'ānic verse from a completely different context to support his argument about Jibrīl's intentions over preventing Pharaoh surviving the sea water. Its original context concerns those condemned to Hellfire who plead to be returned to life where they would not return to their previous sinful ways. The Qur'ān argues that if their wish were fulfilled they would certainly return to their former wicked ways.

Al-Nābulusī finishes by stating that:

No-one thinks that the meaning was that [it was] out of fear that God's mercy might reach Pharaoh in the next life and he might die in a state of belief. This was far from the infallible angel Jibrīl's intention for him [Pharaoh].¹³⁵

Finally, it is clear from al-Nābulusī's argument that he is largely but superficially in accord with al-Rāzī's and al-Zamakhsharī's statements concerning Jibrīl's role in the death of Pharaoh. Al-Rāzī ultimately denies God's mercy for Pharaoh, not through Jibrīl, but through the unacceptability of his faith. Al-Zamakhsharī holds that Jibrīl put mud in Pharaoh's mouth owing to God's anger for the unbeliever who seeks belief when it will not benefit him.¹³⁶ He categorically refutes that Jibrīl did this for fear that God's mercy might reach Pharaoh. Thus, al-Zamakhsharī's position is much the same as al-Rāzī's.

Pharaoh's Death in a State of Purity

Al-Nābulusī's final argument concerning the acceptability of Pharaoh's faith revolves around the issue of his dying pure and purified of badness and sin.¹³⁷ In this al-Nābulusī is following Ibn ʿArabī, who states:

God took him [Pharaoh] pure (*tāhir*) and purified (*muṭahhar*). There was no badness in him because He took him at the moment of his faith before he acquired any sins.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹³⁶ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, II, 366-9.

¹³⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277-8.

¹³⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 201.

Al-Nābulusī agrees with this and restates that Pharaoh's faith is supported by the Qur'ān which must be believed and held as true.¹³⁹ However, he goes further than Ibn 'Arabī. Whereas Ibn 'Arabī says that Pharaoh died purified not possessing any badness at all, al-Nābulusī states:

God took him pure of the stain of unbelief ... and washed clean (*maghsūl*) with sea-water. At that moment there was no spiritual or physical impurity in him.¹⁴⁰

Unlike Ibn 'Arabī, who uses the term 'purified' (*mutahhar*), al-Nābulusī uses the term 'washed clean' (*maghsūl*). This is a striking difference. The term *maghsūl* echoes the concept of ritual ablution (*ghusl*).¹⁴¹ It is well-known that anyone who has become a Muslim must wash themselves with water.¹⁴² Pharaoh satisfies this condition.

In accordance with Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of Qur'ān 10:90-2, al-Nābulusī has presented Pharaoh as a believer and a Muslim. Furthermore, Pharaoh was cleansed by the sea-water of all his physical and spiritual impurities. At that point, God had Pharaoh drowned before he could acquire any new sins.¹⁴³ This is supported by al-Nābulusī's statements concerning Jibrīl's intentions in putting sea-mud in Pharaoh's mouth to ensure that he died in this world, thus depriving him of the ability

¹³⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 277.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹⁴¹ See al-Bukhārī, *The Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī Arabic-English*, trans. by Dr MM Khan (Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1979), I, 156ff., on *Kitāb al-Ghusl*.

¹⁴² Al-Nasā'ī, *Kitāb al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, ed. by Dr al-Bandarī & Mr Ḥasan (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1991/1411), p.107, cites two *ḥadīths* claiming that someone who has become a Muslim must wash themselves with water.

¹⁴³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

to return to a state of unbelief. This, in turn, is supported by Qur'ān 6:28, 'and if they were to return they would revert to what they were forbidden from doing.' The last Qur'ānic citation al-Nābulusī presents in this respect is Qur'ān 29:65:

If they embark on a boat, they call on God, sincere to Him in religion.¹⁴⁴

Al-Nābulusī explains that this Qur'ānic citation concerns those who are aboard a boat but on the brink of disaster.¹⁴⁵ With Pharaoh in mind, he suggests that sincerity toward God in belief and repentance (*tawba*) is much greater for those who are in the middle of the sea and on the brink of disaster especially when they see others escaping at that very moment.¹⁴⁶ Danger and desperation enhance sincerity rather than belittle it. For al-Nābulusī, this is further scriptural support for the acceptance of Pharaoh's faith while in a situation of peril. Al-Nābulusī suggests that Qur'ān 6:28 only invalidates this faith if those on the point of drowning were to return to land where they would revert to their previous sinful ways. The Qur'ān implies that these people drowned at sea. Likewise, Pharaoh did not return to land. The implication is that he died sincere in his religion, his repentance, belief and submission to God.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278. Al-Nābulusī omits the rest of the citation which is, 'but when He has delivered them safely to land, they become idolaters.' This does not negate al-Nābulusī's argument, however, since it fits in with his interpretation of the Jibrīl stories and with Qur'ān 6:28. Pharaoh was not allowed to return to land so that he might die a believer and thus be guaranteed salvation in the next life.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278. The various *mufasssīrūn* consulted in this chapter all agree that it is idol worshippers who are the subject of the verse. Al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, V, 175, states that what prevents acknowledgement of *tawḥīd* is the love of this world. When these idolaters have their hope of life crushed they revert to the instinct which witnesses *tawḥīd*. Thus, they proclaim monotheism and sincerity to God. However, if God saves them and returns their hope to them, they return to their former love of the world and their idolatry.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

The Acceptability of Pharaoh's Repentance

There is nothing in Ibn ʿArabī's text that states directly that Pharaoh repented for his sins prior to his profession of belief and submission to God. A sincere profession of belief and submission to God implies a measure of repentance, but Ibn ʿArabī is silent on this issue. The closest he comes to a statement on this is: Submission [or Islam] negates what was before it.¹⁴⁷

This statement is al-Nābulusī's starting point for a discussion of Pharaoh's repentance.¹⁴⁸ Al-Nābulusī makes two comments. Firstly, that submission is with respect to someone who is legally responsible (*mukallaf*).¹⁴⁹ Secondly, that the submission supersedes or overcomes the sins and transgressions that came before the act of submission.¹⁵⁰ These two points constitute refinements on Ibn ʿArabī's original position; namely, that if Islam comes from someone who is legally responsible, then all their sins and transgressions are no longer important.

There are a number of aspects to al-Nābulusī's discussion of Pharaoh's repentance, none of which are reflected either in Ibn ʿArabī or in any of the *mufasssirūn*. Al-Nābulusī mentions that Ibn ʿArabī's statement concerning Islam is a

¹⁴⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 201.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278-9. It can be assumed that when all the *mufasssirūn* discuss the issue of Pharaoh's faith, there is an implicit awareness of the issue of repentance. Only three of those surveyed mention the issue explicitly. These are al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, XI, 105, where he explains that Pharaoh had left his repentance too late; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zāʾid*, IV, 60, where he also states that Pharaoh had lost his opportunity to repent; and al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623, where he explains that although Pharaoh's repentance is not accepted this does not mean that all repentance is unacceptable. He adds that the acceptance of repentance is not necessary in terms of reason (*ʿaqlan*) and that this is supported by Qur'ān 10:91.

ḥadīth nabawī.¹⁵¹ He adds that this *ḥadīth* concerns the rights or claims of God

(*ḥuqūq Allāh*).¹⁵² This suggests that as far as God's claims on the penitent person are concerned, the act of submission to God satisfies them. Thus, the penitent person has made amends with God.

Al-Nābulusī also acknowledges that there is the issue of the rights or claims of mankind (*ḥuqūq al-ʿibād*).¹⁵³ These claims are said to remain incumbent upon the legally responsible believer and Muslim.¹⁵⁴ Al-Nābulusī cites the example of Pharaoh as found in Qur'ān 20:79:

And Pharaoh led his people astray and did not lead them aright.¹⁵⁵

Al-Nābulusī recognises that there may have been remorse (*nadam*) in Pharaoh's profession of belief and submission for all his sins against his people, but that he did not live long enough after proclaiming this to ask his people for absolution for his oppression of them and to ask them if he could guide them to belief in Mūsā.¹⁵⁶ He realises that this argument is not sufficient to support Pharaoh's case. He adds:

He may have died repenting (*tāʾib*) also of the claims or rights of mankind. Absolution through the satisfaction of [one's] enemies is a condition of repentance (*tawba*) with respect to the claims or rights of mankind if that is possible for him. If that is not possible then remorse (*nadam*) is sufficient for him.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278. See above where al-Rāzī raises the issue of *taklīf*.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹⁵¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹⁵² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹⁵³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹⁵⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

Al-Nābulusī states that according to various *ḥadīths* remorse (*nadam*) is repentance (*tawba*).¹⁵⁸ He adds to this by quoting from *al-Fatāwā al-Bazzāziyya* and from *Sharḥ Jawharat al-Tawḥīd* by al-Laqqānī, both of which argue that he who dies while still indebted yet had the intention to pay off those debts, will not have to account for those debts on the Day of Judgement.¹⁵⁹ Al-Nābulusī sums this issue up and how it relates to Pharaoh:

If a person repents (*tāb*) for the claims or rights of mankind with remorse (*nadam*) in his heart, his repentance (*tawba*) for sinning against others is sound. However, the claim or right remains incumbent upon the penitent one (*tā'ib*) as a debt (*dāin*) upon him which he must pay. If he intended to pay it if he had lived and he was able to do that, then he would not be held to account for it on Judgement Day in particular. Pharaoh drowned in the sea and he acquired the rank of martyr of the sea after the acceptance of his faith.¹⁶⁰

Pharaoh as Martyr of the Sea

Al-Nābulusī states:

Pharaoh drowned in the sea and he acquired the rank of martyr of the sea (*shahīd al-baḥr*) after the acceptance of his faith.¹⁶¹

This is a powerful statement. It has been acknowledged that the fact that Pharaoh died in the sea signified that he was cleansed, almost in a ritual way, of his

¹⁵⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278. He cites *ḥadīths* from the collections of Ibn Mājah, al-Hākim, al-Bayhaqī, al-Ṭabarānī and Abū Nu'aim. Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. by RA Nicholson (Leiden: Brill, 1911), pp.294-5, states: 'The Apostle said: "Penitence is the act of returning" (*al-nadam al-tawbat*). This saying comprises three things which are involved in *tawbat*, namely, (1) remorse for disobedience, (2) immediate abandonment of sin, and (3) determination not to sin again. As repentance (*tawbat*) involves these three conditions, so contrition (*nadāmat*) may be due to three causes: (1) fear of Divine chastisement and sorrow for evil actions, (2) desire of Divine favour and certainty that it cannot be gained by evil conduct and disobedience, (3) shame before God.'

¹⁵⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278-9.

impurities, both spiritual and physical. Now, al-Nābulusī elevates Pharaoh to the rank of martyr of the sea. This is not something at which Ibn ʿArabī even hints. Its ramifications are far-reaching. In the *ḥadīth* collections of both Muslim and al-Nasāʾī there are statements to the effect that there are five types of martyr, one of which is the person who drowns.¹⁶² Neither of these *ḥadīth* collections connect martyrdom with Pharaoh at all. Al-Nābulusī is making an analogy between the manner in which Pharaoh died, having professed faith and submitted to God, and the manner in which a certain category of martyr can die. When this is combined with the dogma concerning the fate of martyrs, the force of al-Nābulusī's statements here can be appreciated.¹⁶³ Muslim presents a number of *ḥadīths* which state that the spirits of martyrs are in Heaven.¹⁶⁴ Al-Nābulusī is implying that Pharaoh, as a martyr of the sea, is guaranteed a place in Heaven. Ibn ʿArabī does not use this argument at all.

Al-Nābulusī completes his discussion of Pharaoh's repentance, debts and elevation to the rank of martyr of the sea with the citation of another *ḥadīth*. This is

¹⁶¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 278-9.

¹⁶² Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-Sharḥ al-Nawawī*, ed. by Dr ʿAbd al-Muʿtī Qalʿajī (Cairo: Dār al-Ghad al-ʿArabī, 1988/1409), VI, 379-80, lists *ḥadīths* which state that the five types of martyr (*shahīd*) are: those who suffer from the plague; those who suffer from an intestinal ailment; those who drown; those who die under a wrecked building; and those who are martyrs in the cause of God. Al-Nasāʾī, *Kitāb*, III, 25, cites a *ḥadīth* which states that the five types of martyr are: those who are killed in the cause of God; those who drown in the cause of God; those who suffer an intestinal ailment in the cause of God; those who suffer from the plague in the cause of God; and those who die in childbirth in the cause of God. For al-Nasāʾī the operative phrase is 'in the cause of God.'

¹⁶³ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VI, 335. The basis for this is Qur'ān 3:169: 'Do not consider that those who have been killed in the cause of God are dead. They are alive and prospering with their God.' On page 336, having described the nature of Heaven, Muslim shows how various scholars have claimed that the 'spirits of the martyrs are here [Heaven].'

quoted from al-Tabarānī and Ibn Mājah. This *ḥadīth* states that the angel of death takes all souls except those of the martyr of the sea which are taken by God alone.

Furthermore:

[God] forgives the martyr of the land all his sins except [his] debt, whereas He forgives the martyr of the sea all his sins and [his] debt.¹⁶⁵

This dispenses entirely with the issue of repentance which depended on whether Pharaoh may have shown remorse or not and whether he intended to settle his debts or not. That issue revolved around intentions which are difficult to ascertain and subject to multiple interpretations. Al-Nābulusī may have recognised this weakness and so introduces the sea-martyr aspect. Pharaoh professed belief before he died. This was accepted according to al-Nābulusī's earlier arguments. As a believer, Pharaoh drowned in the sea and so became a martyr of the sea. As a martyr of the sea his sins and his debts were all forgiven by God and he thus gained a place in Heaven. His submission to God cleared his debts with God and his drowning in the sea cleared his debts with mankind through his becoming a martyr.

The Debate over Pharaoh's Punishment and Ultimate Fate

It is implied in al-Nābulusī's previous arguments that the fact that Pharaoh is saved in the next life but is not in this life means that Pharaoh is not punished in the next life. Al-Nābulusī covers this issue in detail. He proposes that Pharaoh was not one of those who waited until they saw the painful eternal torment of the next life to

¹⁶⁴ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VI, 334-8.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 279.

believe in God.¹⁶⁶ Pharaoh professed his belief in this world before drowning in the sea while hoping to survive the watery death that awaited him.

Al-Nābulusī states that according to Qur'ān 10:96-7 eternal punishment is reserved for those who do not believe in God in this life despite every sign of God's existence coming to them during their life-time.¹⁶⁷ It is apparent from al-Nābulusī's and Ibn 'Arabī's argument that Pharaoh professed belief before his death. Thus, the strictures of Qur'ān 10:96-7, according to al-Nābulusī, have no relevance to Pharaoh thanks to the evidence of Qur'ān 10:90-1 concerning his profession of belief in and submission to God. Al-Nābulusī states:

He upon whom the word is incumbent does not believe until he sees¹⁶⁸, rather [until he] tastes the painful punishment which is the eternal punishment. ... [This] shows that he believes after death, which belief is unacceptable according to consensus (*ijmā'*). Pharaoh did not do this because he believed before death.¹⁶⁹

Although al-Nābulusī does not agree with those that affirm that Pharaoh is damned to Hellfire in the next life, he does acknowledge that Pharaoh was rebuked by God for the tardiness of his coming to belief.¹⁷⁰ Al-Nābulusī suggests that God took Pharaoh's soul in a manner that required his punishment and rebuke both in this life and the next. This stems from a discussion of Qur'ān 79:25:

And God took him as an exemplary punishment of the Next world and the Present.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300.

¹⁶⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300.

¹⁶⁸ This is a variation on Qur'ān 10:96-7.

¹⁶⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 300.

¹⁷⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 279.

¹⁷¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 280. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XXX, 23-4, states that God took Pharaoh as a punishment for his first heretical statement and his last. Equally, he states that God hastened

Al-Nābulusī argues that this exemplary punishment took place at one time and in one place. That is to say, the punishment due to Pharaoh in this world and the next came at one time and in one place. This was Pharaoh's drowning in this life in the present world. The drowning combined his punishment in both worlds. God's rebuke and punishment of Pharaoh was in this world only, because the Next World is much more important. The fact that Qur'ān 10:90 indicates that Pharaoh professed belief and submitted means that God could not punish him in the next life. Thus, God punished him in this world only.¹⁷²

Pharaoh as a Sign for Posterity

Ibn 'Arabī refers to Qur'ān 10:92 and Qur'ān 12:87 when he states:

And He made him a sign of His care for whom He wills so that no-one despairs of the mercy of God. No-one despairs of the soothing mercy of God save those who do not believe. If Pharaoh had been one of those who despair, he would not have rushed to faith.¹⁷³

Pharaoh's drowning along with the fiery fate He had prepared for him in the next world. He includes the understanding that God punished him in this world and the next. Al-Nasafī, *Madārik*, IV, 247-8, understands Qur'ān 79:25 as meaning that God punished Pharaoh in this world and the next. Al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālīm*, IV, 444, follows al-Nasafī in saying that God punished Pharaoh in this world with drowning and with fire in the next. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, IX, 20-22, also understands the verse in the way that al-Baghawī and al-Nasafī do, but with variations on what they say. Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, IV, 696, al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, VI, 471, al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār*, V, 172, and al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr*, VI, 512-3 all offer the same understanding of this verse as Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Baghawī and al-Nasafī.

¹⁷² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 280.

¹⁷³ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 201. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XI, 105-6, states that Pharaoh is a sign for people not to sin against God, and XIII, 28-9, that only those who deny God His power to create what He wants are desperate for His mercy. The following all agree that Pharaoh is a sign of God's punishment: al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if*, III, 114; al-Nasafī, *Madārik*, II, 135; al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālīm*, II, 367; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, IV, 61-2; al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, II, 369; al-Rāzī, *Commentary*, III, 623-4; al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār*, III, 101; and al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr*, III, 568. That none of these *mufasssirūn* agree with al-Nābulusī's understanding of Pharaoh is clear.

God was therefore concerned for Pharaoh and Pharaoh received God's mercy.

Al-Nābulusī follows Ibn ʿArabī's argument. Pharaoh was a believer and a Muslim when he died, not an unbeliever nor in despair for God's mercy. For the Qur'ānic exegetes, Pharaoh was an unbeliever desperate for his life and thus for the mercy of God. His desperation rendered his profession of belief unacceptable and so he died an unbeliever. For al-Nābulusī, like Ibn ʿArabī, Pharaoh professed his belief, which was acceptable whether it was out of desperation or out of hope, and thus received the mercy of God.

Al-Nābulusī argues that Pharaoh received the salvation he wanted:

His [Pharaoh's] salvation was the salvation he wanted through his faith and submission - that is to say, the salvation of his being accepted by God and of his joining the Israelites in their faith, submission, and salvation from drowning.¹⁷⁴

God accepted Pharaoh's faith and submission. He did join the Israelites in their faith and submission. Furthermore, his body was delivered up out of the flood and his soul was taken to Heaven.¹⁷⁵

Pharaoh represents a sign of God's universal mercy to all mankind, no matter how sinful and evil they may be. Al-Nābulusī is stressing God's ethical mercy through the story of Pharaoh. At another level, al-Nābulusī, like Ibn ʿArabī, is hinting at the fact that in terms of God's universal mercy as understood as a metaphysical concept of 'provider of existence', everyone shall be returned to God, who is the ultimate

¹⁷⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 279.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 279.

ontological source and destination of all things.¹⁷⁶ It is through God's mercy that existence is passed to everything. Divine mercy is omnipresent. Ontologically, its absence signifies non-existence. Pharaoh's very existence in this world suggests he was in receipt of God's mercy.

Finally, al-Nābulusī adds that God had determined that Pharaoh was to drown and that his moment to die had been reached, so Pharaoh was drowned in accordance with God's determination.¹⁷⁷

Conclusion

Al-Nābulusī states:

The author's [Ibn 'Arabī's] statement here, 'the matter concerning it [Pharaoh's faith] belongs to God,' does not indicate that he is in any way uncertain with regard to it, nor that he is hesitant either with regard to what follows it [the statement], [which is] 'due to the majority of people's certainty concerning his [Pharaoh's] wretchedness.' He [Ibn 'Arabī] means, 'we affirm that we entrust (*tafwīḍ*) the matter of Pharaoh to God because of their certainty concerning his wretchedness and not because of what we know about that [issue].'¹⁷⁸

Al-Nābulusī is clarifying Ibn 'Arabī's words of apparent equivocation on the issue of Pharaoh. Al-Nābulusī, like other adept Sufis, has no doubt on this issue at all.¹⁷⁹ Their understanding is that Pharaoh's faith was sound and thus accepted by

¹⁷⁶ See the chapter on Zakariyyā in this thesis on the subject of ethical and ontological mercy in the thought of Ibn 'Arabī and al-Nābulusī. This is a central theme for both of them.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 279.

¹⁷⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301.

¹⁷⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301.

God. On the other hand, most people are not graced with such certainty on this issue and Ibn ʿArabī, like others, has to take this into account when discussing the issue.¹⁸⁰

Al-Nābulusī, unlike Ibn ʿArabī, is not so apparently equivocal in his discussion. He states consistently and unambiguously that Pharaoh's profession of faith was sound and acceptable. He argues, with the lawyer's touch for comprehensive and solid argumentation, that on all counts, whether his own or those of his polemical opponents, Pharaoh cannot be found wanting with regard to the acceptance of his faith. Thus, al-Nābulusī, unlike Ibn ʿArabī, apparently sensed no insurmountable problems in addressing this issue in such an explicit manner. He certainly felt qualified to talk on this issue and others with an air of authority:

The possessors of hearts which have been purified by lawful devotions, who are the people of realisation and mystical gnosis have no doubt whatsoever concerning any issue.¹⁸¹

This transcends the issue of Pharaoh's faith and states that adept Sufis have no doubt whatsoever with regard to any issue. There is an implicit contrast here between these adept Sufis and all other types of person. Everyone other than the adept Sufis may have doubts on any issue unlike the Sufis. Al-Nābulusī is stating that he, being an adept Sufi, has no doubts on any issue. This elevates him into a position of being one of the few people qualified to interpret correctly the Qur'ān and religious tradition. This, if one accepts his argument, further supports his views on the issue of Pharaoh's faith.

¹⁸⁰ See the chapter on al-Nābulusī's introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, where he argues that those who possess mystical insight (*dhawq*) can easily be misunderstood in what they say by those who possess a less complete form of faith in and knowledge of God.

¹⁸¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301.

Al-Nābulusī has stated that he does have constraints on what he is able to say publicly:

They [adept Sufis] are reporting knowledge to exotericists with support from linguistic and theological texts [and they do this] with sound unveiling (*kashf*) and mystical knowledge for themselves and others like them.¹⁸²

However, there is little evidence of exoteric constraint in what he says on the issue of Pharaoh's faith when it is contrasted with the orthodox views expressed in the various *tafāsīr* that predate al-Nābulusī. It should be reiterated that al-Nābulusī has openly declared his intention in passing on his comments on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. He views himself as an interpreter between exotericists (*ʿulamāʾ al-rusūm*) and esotericists (*ʿulamāʾ al-ḥaqāʾiq*).¹⁸³

Al-Nābulusī's final statement is a comment on Qur'ān 10:92 which is:

That you might be a sign for those who come after you. Indeed, many people are heedless of Our signs.¹⁸⁴

Al-Nābulusī views this verse as an exhortation to wake up to the true message of the story of Pharaoh. He was a sinner who became a believer and received God's mercy.¹⁸⁵ Pharaoh is not a sign of God's wrath for those who do not believe during their lifetime.¹⁸⁶ On the contrary, Pharaoh is a sign of God's mercy for those who come to God as believers and Muslims.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301. See above.

¹⁸³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 5.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301.

¹⁸⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 301.

¹⁸⁶ This is the view of the majority of Qur'ānic exegetes.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 341, states that everything on earth and heaven is a believing servant of God.

Al-Nābulusī, like Ibn ʿArabī, is portraying a God who is essentially merciful and compassionate. This mercy is both ethical and ontological. They both want people to believe that no one should despair of God's mercy, not even the vilest and most wicked sinner.¹⁸⁸ Faith, whether it comes in the dying desperate moments of one's life or whether it is brought about by hope and desire, will guarantee salvation. This may not be salvation in this life, but it will certainly guarantee salvation in the next life.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ In a sense they are both revelling in the implications of God's all-encompassing mercy. See the chapter on Zakariyyā.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 302.

CHAPTER 8

Muḥammad

Introduction

Concepts of Muḥammad within the general sphere of Islam and the specific sphere of Sufism are of great significance.¹ The concept of Muḥammad as the first creation, which is the intermediary between God and the world, is the focus of this chapter. As first creation, Muḥammad is also the principle from which everything else is created. A discussion of Muḥammad as a light travelling through the series of prophets from Adam up to the historical figure of Muḥammad shall also be examined as a part of this discussion of the first creation.

Ibn ʿArabī and Muḥammad

One of the most studied aspects of Ibn ʿArabī's thought is his theory of the 'Perfect Man'.² His 'Perfect Man' *par excellence* is Muḥammad. This is not the

¹ Chodkiewicz, M, *Seal of the Saints - Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p.60, states that 'the concept of a Muḥammadan reality which is not only fully constituted and active before the appearance in this world of the person named Muḥammad, but is also situated prior to history, has been the subject of heated debate in Islam.' Izutsu, T, *Sufism and Taoism - A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (London: University of California Press, 1984), p.236, states that 'the "Reality of Muḥammad" (*ḥaqīqa Muḥammad* or *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadīyah*), is one of the most important concepts in the philosophy of Ibn ʿArabī.' Izutsu notes that this concept has been dealt with in detail by Affifi, as Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine of the *logos*, in his *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid-Din-Ibnul ʿArabi* (Cambridge: CUP, 1939).

² See Nicholson, RA, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: 1921); Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy*; Corbin, H, *Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. by R Manheim

historical Muhammad, but a concept of Muhammad which possesses ontological and mystical significance. Annemarie Schimmel writes that:

One of the central themes (if not the central theme) of mystical prophetology is that of the Light of Muhammad, *nūr Muḥammad*.³

Ibn ʿArabī writes at length about Muḥammad in various texts such as the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. In order to appreciate the contrast between Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī concerning the concept of Muḥammad as found in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, it is necessary to examine the elements of Ibn ʿArabī's text which are the focus of al-Nābulusī's comments.⁴

In the first few pages of his chapter on Muḥammad, Ibn ʿArabī discusses the significance of Muḥammad's uniqueness in terms of the triadic relationship between

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Jeffery, A, 'Ibn ʿArabī's *Shajarat al-Kawn*', *Studia Islamica*, 10 (1959), 43-77, & 11 (1959), 113-160; and Izutsu, *Sufism*. Schimmel, A, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975) & *And Muḥammad is His Messenger* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985) and Chodkiewicz, *Seal*, appear to add little substance to the work of these earlier scholars. Nicholson, Affifi, Corbin, Jeffery and Izutsu all reach similar positions in their understanding of Ibn ʿArabī's concept of Muḥammad. The scholarly heritage in their works is apparent. Affifi refers to Nicholson. Corbin refers to both Affifi and Nicholson. Jeffery acknowledges the debt owed to Corbin, Affifi and Nicholson. Izutsu refers to Affifi and Jeffery. Nicholson and Affifi argue that Ibn ʿArabī was an outright pantheist and monist. Corbin stresses different aspects to his predecessors. Jeffery is in the same vein as Nicholson and Affifi, whereas Izutsu adopts a thorough-going semantic-analytical approach to the material. One study that does break new ground in the study of Ibn ʿArabī's concept of the Perfect Man is Takeshita, M, *Ibn ʿArabī's Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought* (Tokyo, 1987). He examines three motifs used by Ibn ʿArabī in the discussion of the Perfect Man: Adam created in the image of God; the correspondences of the microcosm and the macrocosm; and the motif of Sufi saints as the supreme example of the Perfect Man in contrast with the Animal Man. This is a wide-ranging and comparative thesis which examines the most representative treatments of these three motifs in Islamic thought.

³ Schimmel, *And Muḥammad*, p.123.

⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. by AA ʿAffī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1980), I, 214-216.

God, Man, and Woman. Ibn ʿArabī makes use of both Qurʾānic citations and allusions as well as *ḥadīths* to begin and support his remarks on this triadic relationship.

Ibn ʿArabī's title for the chapter on Muḥammad is revealing:

The bezel of the wisdom of singularity in the logos of Muḥammad.⁵

Stressing the uniqueness and perfection of Muḥammad in the opening lines, Ibn ʿArabī remarks that Muḥammad was a prophet while Adam was still between water and clay and Muḥammad was the seal of the prophets through his 'elemental formation.'⁶ Ibn ʿArabī adds that Muḥammad was:

The best evidence (*dalīl*)⁷ for his Lord, for he was given all the words which are what are denoted by the names of Adam⁸ and he thus resembled the evidence in his three-fold nature.⁹

A little later, Ibn ʿArabī emphasises again that 'Muḥammad was the clearest evidence of his Lord.'¹⁰ This is also echoed in the chapter on Ibrāhīm, where Ibn ʿArabī states:

He [Muḥammad] said, 'whoever knows himself knows his Lord,' and he is the most knowledgeable creature concerning God.¹¹

⁵ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 214.

⁶ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 214.

⁷ The Arabic word *dalīl* has the meaning of indication, sign, token, symptom, proof, evidence. It has very strong legal connotations.

⁸ This is an allusion to Qurʾān 2:31.

⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 214.

¹⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 215.

¹¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 81. There are interesting parallels between the chapters on Ibrāhīm and Muḥammad concerning gnosis of God.

Having initially mentioned the importance of Muḥammad's knowledge of God, Ibn 'Arabī highlights the concept of the number 'three'. He makes a paradoxical statement in the middle of his discussion of Muḥammad's uniqueness:

The first odd number (*awwal al-afrād*) is three. None of the odd numbers exceed this priority; rather, they are from it.¹²

A little later, Ibn 'Arabī states that Muḥammad resembles the evidence for his Lord in his three-fold nature. He adds, including a *ḥadīth*:

Since his reality gave the first uniqueness because of his three-fold formation, thus he said in the chapter of love, which is the origin of existent things, 'There are three things of your world which are beloved to me.' ... Then he mentioned 'women, perfume and I found joy in prayer.'¹³

Finally at the end of his discussion on God, Man and Woman, Ibn 'Arabī states:

Thus 'the three' appeared: God, Man and Woman. The man yearned for his Lord who was his origin as the woman yearns for him [man].¹⁴

It appears from Ibn 'Arabī's discussion that God, Man and Woman form a connected triad. They are related to each other and their relationship is symbolic of a larger mystical 'truth'. This 'truth' concerns God's relationship with His creation and their knowledge of and yearning for each other.

Ibn 'Arabī refers to the 'creative' element in his discussion on Muḥammad with the reference to 'love being the origin of existent things.' He states in the same vein:

Woman is a part of man in the origin of the appearance of her essence.¹⁵

¹² Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 214.

¹³ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 214.

¹⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 216.

¹⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 215.

And,

Every part of the world is evidence of its origin which is its Lord.¹⁶

In the same context, Ibn ʿArabī raises the issue of gnosis (*maʿrifa*). Having remarked that woman is a part of man, Ibn ʿArabī states that man must know himself before knowing his Lord since knowing his Lord is a result of knowing himself.¹⁷ Ibn ʿArabī then cites the Sufi adage:

Whoever knows himself knows his Lord.¹⁸

Ibn ʿArabī follows this by discussing man's relationship with woman and then man's relationship with God. These relationships are symbolic of each other. Ibn ʿArabī has cited the *ḥadīth* in which Muḥammad announces that the first thing of this world that is beloved to him is women. From the statements that woman is a part of man and that every part of the world is evidence for its origin, Ibn ʿArabī argues that Muḥammad yearned for women because 'the universal yearns for its particular.'¹⁹

A few lines later, Ibn ʿArabī states, alluding to the Qur'ān,²⁰ that:

¹⁶ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 215. This alludes to Qur'ān 4:1, 7:189, and 39:6, all of which refer to the creation of man and then of a partner from him.

¹⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 215.

¹⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 215. See the reference above to the chapter on Ibrāhīm where Ibn ʿArabī cites this same epigram and associates it with Muḥammad being the most knowledgeable creature concerning God.

¹⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 215.

²⁰ Qur'ān 4:1, 7:189 and 39:6, all of which refer to the creation of man and then of a partner from him.

God derived from man, for [the benefit of] man, a person in his form which He called woman. So she appeared in his form. He yearned for her as a thing yearns for itself and she yearned for him as a thing yearns for its home.²¹

Ibn ʿArabī is elaborating an understanding of creation in which the creator yearns for his creation and the creation yearns for its creator. Man yearns for woman as he yearns for himself. Woman yearns for man as though he were her 'home'. The reciprocity of yearning is significant. Furthermore, man yearns for woman in order that he might know himself. Through this self-knowledge, man may know his Lord.

The language of love and of the yearning between man and woman is very concrete and suggestive. It enables Ibn ʿArabī to impart an understanding of the relationship between God and man, and thereby between God and the whole of creation.

Ibn ʿArabī has stated that the universal yearns for its particular. He has shown that man yearns for woman. He now argues that God yearns for man. The relationship between God and man mirrors that between man and woman - man is God's Eve. Ibn ʿArabī introduces the new discussion through a Qur'ānic citation, which he remarks concerns man's elemental formation, and a *ḥadīth*:

'And I breathed in him of My spirit.'²² And then He described Himself with great longing to meet him. He said to those who are longing, 'Dāwūd! I am more longing than they' - that is, [than] those who are longing for Him.²³

In his opening lines on this chapter, Ibn ʿArabī mentions that Muḥammad was the seal of the prophets through his elemental formation. The above citation may refer

²¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 216.

²² Qur'ān 15:29 and Qur'ān 38:72.

to this, since Ibn ʿArabī appears to hold that God is breathing His spirit into man's body or elemental formation. A little later, Ibn ʿArabī states:

Do you not see that He [God] created him [Muḥammad] in His form, because he was of His spirit? Since his formation was of these four elements which are called humours in his body, there resulted from His breathing a burning because of the wetness in his body. Man's spirit was thus fire because of his formation.²⁴

Medieval Islam inherited via the teachings of Galen various Aristotelian ideas concerning the four elements and humours which constitute matter.²⁵ This is referred to in the above citation. God's act of breathing His spirit into man's body resulted in 'burning.' This made man's spirit fire.²⁶

Ibn ʿArabī also refers to this breath (*naḥkha*) as the breath of the Merciful One (*naḥas al-raḥmān*).²⁷ He argues that man's essence appeared through this breath and that the burning was fire and not light because of man's predisposition.²⁸ Ibn ʿArabī also contrasts man's 'fiery' nature with the 'luminous' nature of angels:

If his formation had been natural, his spirit would have been light (*nūr*). ... God loves those whom He has created in His form. He made the luminous angels prostrate before him [man] despite the grandeur of their rank and the sublimity of their natural formation.²⁹

²³ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 215.

²⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 216.

²⁵ Hourani, A, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p.202, states that 'the core of Muslim medical knowledge was taken from Greek medical and physiological theory, and in particular from the work of Galen The basis of this theory was the belief that the human body was made up of four elements of which the whole material world was composed: fire, air, earth and water. These elements could be mixed ..., and the various mixtures gave rise to different temperaments and "humours".' For further information concerning Galen, see Walzer, R, 'Djālīnūs', in *El²* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), II, 402-3.

²⁶ Hankinson, RJ, 'Science', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. by J Barnes (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp.140-167 (p.151). It appears that Ibn ʿArabī is broadly following Aristotle's contention that both wetness and dryness were the passive substrate in which change occurs. This change is activated in this instance by God's spirit which is breathed into man's body.

²⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 216.

²⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 216.

²⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 216.

Ibn ʿArabī is suggesting that the ‘natural’ formation of angels is light. This is in contrast with man whose spirit is fire. Light is used here as a defining attribute of angels in contradistinction to mankind who are defined by fire.

Since God breathed His spirit into man’s body, God created man in His form. Thus, Ibn ʿArabī argues that God yearns for Himself when He yearns for man.³⁰ This explains the paradoxical statement concerning Muḥammad:

He was the best evidence of His Lord. and so he resembled the evidence in his three-fold nature. The evidence is evidence of itself.³¹

God breathed His spirit into Muḥammad, ‘the most perfect existent in this human species’, and so God created Muḥammad in His form. So, when God longs for Muḥammad, He is really longing only for Himself. This mirrors a statement in the chapter on Ibrāhīm which describes one of the mystical states of knowing God:

The revelation imparts to you that God Himself was the same as the evidence for Himself and for His divinity, and that the world is only His self-manifestation in the forms of their immutable essences whose existence is impossible without Him.³²

The earlier statements about man’s relationship with woman are applicable to God and man. God yearns for man as a thing yearns for itself, but man yearns for God as a thing yearns for its home. Ibn ʿArabī finishes this particular discussion by proclaiming that the form in which man was created is the most perfect, majestic and grandest connection between God and man. This form made a double (*shafaʿat*) or

³⁰ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 216.

³¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 214.

partner (*zawj*) of God's existence. This is replicated in the connection between man and woman - woman made a double of man through her existence and made him a partner.³³

In the first few pages of Ibn 'Arabī's chapter on Muḥammad it is clear that Ibn 'Arabī is describing the triadic relationship between God, man and woman. He emphasises the significance of this relationship for creation and gnosis. Underlying this discussion is the oneness of reality. God alone is real and one. He breathes of His spirit in to man. When God yearns for man, He yearns for Himself. When man yearns for God, it is really God in man yearning for His home, for Himself.

Al-Nābulusī and Muḥammad

Ibn 'Arabī's title of the chapter on Muḥammad is:

The bezel of the wisdom of singularity in the logos of Muḥammad.³⁴

Al-Nābulusī discusses the location of the chapter in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.³⁵

This is only implied in Ibn 'Arabī's original:

His wisdom was unique because he was the most perfect existent in this human species. Therefore, the [divine] command (*al-amr*)³⁶ began with him and was sealed with him. So, he was a prophet

³² Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 81.

³³ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 216.

³⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 214.

³⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ Jawāhir al-Nuṣūṣ fī Ḥall Kalimāt al-Fuṣūṣ*, 2 vols (Cairo: Būlāq, 1304-1323), II, 307.

³⁶ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 214. 'Affair/command' is a translation of the Arabic word '*al-amr*', which has both the sense of affair and that of command. Both senses are probably present here. There is the further sense of 'the affair of creation or existence.' The Qur'ān makes reference to God's command in various contexts, some of which are pertinent to creation and others to the Day of Judgement. (See Qur'ān 7:54, 16:1-2, 22:65, 30:25, 30:46, 33:38, 40:15, 40:78, 54:50, 65:12). It may signify, from a Qur'ānic point of view, the beginning and end of all things. It thus possesses a sense of 'everything,' 'the whole matter.' It shall be referred to as 'the [divine] command'

when Adam was between the water and the clay, and then he was in his elemental nature the seal of the prophets.³⁷

This alludes to Muḥammad's perfection as a human being. He is said to be the Perfect Man *par excellence*, although what that signifies is absent. Muḥammad's 'priority' over all other things, except for God, is established. This is an allusion to his pre-existence. Adam is traditionally viewed as the first human being, so if the divine command began with Muḥammad, then Muḥammad must 'exist' in some form or other before Adam. Muḥammad was also the seal of the divine command and the seal of the Prophets. Muḥammad's prophetic posteriority over all things, except for God, is affirmed. Ibn ʿArabī is suggesting the rationale for putting Muḥammad at the end of the *Fuṣūṣ*.³⁸

Al-Nābulusī proposes three reasons for the location of Muḥammad at the end of the *Fuṣūṣ*.

He [Muḥammad] was close to the era of Khālīd b. Sinān. ... He was the last of the prophets and the seal of those sent with a message.³⁹ Thus it is appropriate that the book ends with him as it began with Adam. ... He gathers together [in himself] all the inclinations and movements of all the prophets and messengers that preceded him.⁴⁰

henceforth. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p.223, notes that 'amr' is the divine command, but that in al-Jīlī's theosophy it is equated with the Muḥammadan Reality.

³⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 214.

³⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 214.

³⁹ This is in accordance with Islamic tradition which viewed Muḥammad as the seal of the prophets. See Qur'ān 33:40 and al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Egypt: Maimaniyya Press, 1321), XXII, 11. Friedmann, Y, *Prophecy Continuous - Aspects of Aḥmadī Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p.56, argues that the understanding of Qur'ān 33:40 as signifying that Muḥammad was the last prophet soon became a cardinal article of faith in Islam.

⁴⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 307. Later in the present chapter of this thesis there is a discussion of al-Nābulusī's contention that the prophets preceding Muḥammad were 'filter-vessels', derived from the

The penultimate prophet in the series of prophets beginning with Adam was Khālīd b. Sinān.⁴¹ In Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* this prophet is the subject of the penultimate chapter. Al-Nābulusī emphasises Muḥammad as the last in the line of prophets and the seal of the messengers. The book is ‘sealed’ with Muḥammad just as the series of prophets was sealed.

Al-Nābulusī states that Muḥammad gathers together the ‘wisdoms’ and ‘teachings’ of all the previous prophets in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. He adds:

Mentioning him [Muḥammad] after mentioning them [the previous prophets] was like summation (*al-ijmāl*) after differentiation (*al-tafṣīl*)⁴² or like a brief summary (*al-fadhklaka*) after a long account (*al-hisāb*).⁴³

Muḥammad brings together all other prophets and messengers. He is, to maintain the ‘accounting’ metaphor, the bottom line in the list of figures. He sums everything up and represents the whole picture. He is a microcosm of all his prophetic antecedents. He is pure ‘prophetic light’ which is refracted through the prism of

Muḥammadan Light, into which he was poured so that he might be purified by them. These previous prophets were Muḥammad to the extent that they were the vessels carrying the ‘Muḥammadan water’ and were derived from his Light.

⁴¹ Pellat, C, ‘Khālīd b. Sinān b. ‘Ayth al-‘Absī’, in *EF*² (Leiden: Brill, 1978), IV, 928, who is held to be one of the personages of the interval between Christ and Muḥammad, who, in Islamic tradition, was considered as a prophet.

⁴² See al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 21, where he discusses the motivation for God’s creation of the world. The totality of spiritual and corporeal existence is said to come from God as a differentiation (*tafṣīl*) from a summation (*ijmāl*) and returns to Him as summated (*mujmal*) from differentiation. God in Himself is the oneness of summation, while creation is the multiplicity of differentiation. He argues that God wanted to see His summated essence in the mirror of differentiation. Muḥammad is seen in an analogous light here: he is the oneness that is differentiated into the multiplicity of prophets. The series of prophets is a mirror reflecting his oneness in a multitude of aspects. He unites them all. They come from him and they return to him.

⁴³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 307.

creation into the diverse spectrum of particular prophetic colours. Whereas these ‘prophetic colours’ represent individual wisdoms, Muḥammad represents the totality of their wisdoms - the pure prophetic light. This is an important aspect of his uniqueness.

Muḥammad as the first creation

Al-Nābulusī begins his commentary on Muḥammad as first creation with an explication of Ibn ‘Arabī’s use of the *ḥadīth* that ‘Muḥammad was a prophet while Adam was still between water and clay.’

Ibn ‘Arabī states that Muḥammad’s wisdom is unique because:

He was the most perfect existent thing in this human species. Thus, the [divine] command (*al-amr*)⁴⁴ began with him and ended with him.⁴⁵

Ibn ‘Arabī clarifies this ambiguous statement, by saying that:

Muḥammad was a prophet while Adam was still between water and clay and then he was the seal of the prophets through his elemental nature.⁴⁶

This implies that Muḥammad existed prior to Adam in a non-elemental or non-physical nature and was also the last of the prophets to exist, but in an elemental or physical nature.

⁴⁴ It was mentioned above that this particular word has various connotations, most drawn from the Qur’ān: divine affair or command; the divine act of creation or existentiality.

⁴⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 214.

⁴⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 1, 214. ‘Elemental nature’ probably alludes to the four elements (air, fire, water, and earth) of which all bodies were believed to be composed. Jeffery, ‘Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Shajarat al-Kawn*’, *Studia Islamica*, 10 (1959), p.47, argues that the notion of the pre-existence of the Prophet was congenial to the Sufis, but was also accepted by the Sunnī theologians. He produces the same *ḥadīth* used by Ibn ‘Arabī here.

Al-Nābulusī alters Ibn ʿArabī's statements. Ibn ʿArabī has stated that the 'divine command' began with Muḥammad. Al-Nābulusī adds:

And so Muḥammad was the first created thing with respect to his being light.⁴⁷

There is no hint of Muḥammad's association with light in Ibn ʿArabī's text.⁴⁸

This is the main difference between Ibn ʿArabī and al-Nābulusī in this chapter. This shows al-Nābulusī's creativity with regard to Ibn ʿArabī's themes and ideas. Al-Nābulusī supports the statement concerning Muḥammad being the first created thing with respect to his being a light with a *ḥadīth*:

Jābir⁴⁹ asked, 'Oh messenger of God! Tell me about the first thing that God created before [all other] things!' The Prophet said, 'Jābir, God created before [all other] things the light of your Prophet from His Light.'⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308.

⁴⁸ In the earlier section of this chapter which surveys Ibn ʿArabī's discussion on Muḥammad in terms of the triadic relationship between God, man and woman, it was shown that light is associated with angels whereas fire is associated with man's spirit. Ibn ʿArabī implies that fire is of more significance than light since the luminous angels were ordered by God to prostrate themselves before the 'fiery' Adam. However, Qur'ān 38:76 states that God made angels out of fire and man out of earth. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the use of the image of light in that earlier context is thematically different to the use made of it by al-Nābulusī here.

⁴⁹ According to Burton, J, *An Introduction to the Hadith* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1994), p.31, this is Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh, a prominent companion of the Prophet.

⁵⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308. Al-Nābulusī tells us that this *ḥadīth* was set forth by ʿAbd al-Razzāq in his *Musnad* and that he has provided in this commentary only a small part of what is in fact a long *ḥadīth*. Rubin, U, 'Pre-existence and light - Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 5 (1975), 62-119 (p.115), states that this tradition of ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d.211) comes in a context where the light of Muḥammad is subordinate to that of God. Chodkiewicz, *Seal*, p.63, states that this *ḥadīth* is absent from the canonical collections. He does suggest that it was to play a major part in the meditation on the Prophet's primordiality.

Al-Nābulusī is using a partial *ḥadīth* out of its original context. The new context - that of the commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* - provides new definitions for the key words in this *ḥadīth*.

From the *ḥadīth* cited by al-Nābulusī, it appears that ‘Muḥammad as light’ was created by God from His own Light. This establishes two degrees of light. There is the primal Light of God and the secondary light of Muḥammad, which is derived from that primal Light. After the creation of this secondary or Muḥammadan light, God created all things.⁵¹ Al-Nābulusī does not elaborate in this context what the relationship between all created things and the created Muḥammadan light might be.

Al-Nābulusī elucidates Muḥammad’s nature as the first creation of God elsewhere in the chapter on Muḥammad. Concluding a discussion of the differences between Muḥammad and Adam later in the chapter on Muḥammad, al-Nābulusī states: Bodies are from spirits. Spirits are from the Light of Muḥammad, which is from the Light of God.⁵²

He follows this with an exegesis of the Light Verse (Qur’ān 24:35):

God said, ‘God is the Light of the heavens and the earth,’ which [Light] is the origin. [He also said] ‘the likeness of His Light,’ that is to say: from which [likeness] God created every thing, as mentioned in the earlier *ḥadīth*.⁵³ This [likeness of His Light] is the Light of Muḥammad.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308.

⁵² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309.

⁵³ See al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308, where the *ḥadīth* concerning Muḥammad’s being asked about the first thing God created appears.

⁵⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309.

At the beginning of the chapter on Adam, al-Nābulusī refers to various concepts of Muḥammad explicitly:

The Reality of Realities ... which is the Light of our Prophet Muḥammad who is the first creation. God created every thing from him. He is the Reality of every reality. ... There is no doubt that the Divine Reality and the Muḥammadan Reality gather together every perfection.⁵⁵

The Perfect Man ... is Adam and his children until the Day of Resurrection. ... The Perfect Man is the only part of the world which gathers together the realities of the spiritual and corporeal world and all its particular individuals.⁵⁶

Al-Nābulusī reiterates that Muḥammad is the first creation of God. This is not the historical Muḥammad, rather some cosmic principle that is instrumental in bringing the world of creation into existence. This cosmic principle is called the Light of Muḥammad and the Reality of Realities.

This Light of Muḥammad is God's creation. It is not God, but it is created from God's Light. It is the likeness (*mathal*) of God's Light. This is supported by the statement that the Muḥammadan Reality performs the same function as the Divine Reality. They both gather together 'every perfection,' which comprise the multiplicity of things, which are creation. They do this in different 'worlds' - God in the world of the '*amr*' and Muḥammad in the world of creation.

This first creation is invested with the semblance of Demiurgic powers. This Demiurgic Muḥammadan Light is a solitary and unique concept which is said to gather

⁵⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 32-3. Al-Nābulusī does clarify that although God and Muḥammad have similar functions, these functions pertain to different worlds. The Divine Reality gathers together every perfection in the 'world of the [divine] command,' whereas the Muḥammadan Reality does so in the 'world of creation.'

within itself the multiplicity of things that are creation. This Demiurge is called the Perfect Man by al-Nābulusī and is said to be Adam and his children too. This Perfect Man gathers together the realities of the corporeal and spiritual world. He is a ‘summated’ concept from which issues the differentiated world of phenomena.

Parallel to this is the theory that Muḥammad is the summation of the differentiated series of prophets from Adam up to the historical figure of Muḥammad. This explains how each prophet can be the Perfect Man who gathers together all the other prophets and realities of the world. This is only the case with regard to their Muḥammadan aspect.

Al-Nābulusī portrays Muḥammad as a cosmic principle existing before the world of created things, yet as God’s first creation. Furthermore, Muḥammad is also portrayed as the last in the series of historical prophets. These ideas are found in Ibn ‘Arabī’s text. Al-Nābulusī elaborates Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas. However, in accordance with his statements to the effect that everything was created from the Muḥammadan Light and that the Muḥammadan Reality is permeating everything⁵⁷, al-Nābulusī states, in the context of Muḥammad’s prophetic pre-existence, that:

He [Muḥammad] had a perfect nature and noble station and rank from the moment God created him as light until He [God] differentiated His summation as a manifestation.⁵⁸ God created for him the Adamic mould. He used it to manifest his [Muḥammad’s] exalted form and then purified him in the filters of the moulds of the perfect prophets and messengers until He brought him out in this

⁵⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 42.

⁵⁷ See the chapter on Hārūn in this thesis where the issue of God permeating every object of worship is discussed. A similar issue is discussed in the chapter on Ibrāhīm concerning man’s awareness of God’s pervasion of creation.

⁵⁸ In other words, God created the world.

[historical] existence [of Muhammad]. He [God] poured him [Muhammad] into the cup of noble traits and goodness.⁵⁹ Thus, he was in the end as he was in the beginning.⁶⁰

With this al-Nābulusī concludes the discussion of the role of Muhammad in the chain of prophets and messengers from Adam until the appearance of the historical Muhammad. The Light of Muhammad, once the creation of the world has occurred, appears in each of the perfect prophets and messengers.⁶¹ In this way, every Perfect Man, who is also a prophet or messenger, contains within them the Light of Muhammad. Each of these Perfect Men is a kind of filter, purifying the Muhammadan Light, until the final perfect form or existence of Muhammad appears in historical time.⁶² This is the historical Muhammad who was the seal of the prophets.

To return to al-Nābulusī's treatment of the *ḥadīth* concerning Muhammad being a prophet while Adam was between water and clay, it should be noted that he

⁵⁹ Rubin, 'Pre-existence', p.92, describes a process in which the ancestors of Muhammad are mere successive vehicles designated for a continuous transmission of the light through their bodies. This light is said to be forwarded from one to another as a whole, without leaving a trace in the body of the former carrier. Al-Nābulusī differs from this thesis in ascribing the function of filter to these vessels. Chodkiewicz, *Seal*, p.60, suggests that according to Ibn 'Arabī every prophet since Adam is but a partial refraction of the primordial Muhammadan Reality (a synonymous phrase for the luminous essence of Muhammad; see Rubin, 'Pre-existence', p.116) at a particular moment of human history. This is also different in emphasis to what al-Nābulusī is describing. Jeffery, 'Ibn 'Arabī's *Shajarat al-Kawn*', *Studia Islamica*, 10 (1959), p.58, on the other hand, in his understanding of Ibn 'Arabī, comes closer to al-Nābulusī. He argues that the whole prophetic succession pointed ahead to the time when the Muhammadan light would in a more complete way find embodiment in a final messenger who would be the seal of the Prophets.

⁶⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308.

⁶¹ Rubin, 'Pre-existence', p.75, echoes this when he says that 'traditions striving to emphasise Muhammad's superiority over the rest of the prophets maintain that the latter were created from his light.'

⁶² Razavi, MA, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination* (Richmond: Curzon, 1997), p.122, states that 'Shī'ite Islam, which emphasised the twelve Imāms as a chain of initiators through which the Muhammadan light manifested itself, was naturally receptive to ishrāqī doctrine.' This Shī'a use of

cites three variations of it.⁶³ These establish the priority of Muḥammad over Adam and the fact that Muḥammad was the first creation and the last messenger cum prophet.

This *ḥadīth* is a support for the statement that the [divine] command began with Muḥammad. This existent Muḥammad had an elemental or physical nature and, in this way, he was the seal of the prophets and messengers. Al-Nābulusī cites Qur'ān 33:40 in this context:

Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets.⁶⁴

The combination of his pre-existence and his existent physical nature appear to make him 'the most perfect existent in the human species.'⁶⁵

The perfection of Muḥammad is more apparent when appreciated in the context of the cosmogony that al-Nābulusī presents in the commentary on the chapter on Muḥammad and elsewhere.⁶⁶ This is noteworthy since al-Nābulusī has stated frequently that Muḥammad, or, rather, the Light of Muḥammad was the first creation

light is in accord with Rubin, 'Pre-existence', p.65, where he states that the Shī'a is the Muslim sect that has made the utmost use of light.

⁶³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308. These are: 'I was a prophet while Adam was between the spirit and body.' It is stated that this is from al-Ṭabarānī (d.360/971) and whose authority is Ibn ʿAbbās; 'I was the first person to be created and the last to be sent.' It is stated that this is attributed to Ibn Saʿd's *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* and its authority is given as being that as Qatāda (d.117). This *ḥadīth* is described as *mursal*, which means that it is reported as from the Prophet by a Successor, presumably Qatāda in this case, but lacking identification of the Companion informant. See Burton, *Introduction*, pp.112 & 200; and 'I was the first prophet to be created and the last to be sent.' It is stated that this is attributed to al-Ḥākim's *Mustadrak*. No authority is given.

⁶⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308.

⁶⁵ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 214.

⁶⁶ Long, CH, 'Cosmogony', in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Eliade Mircea (New York & London: Macmillan & Free Press, 1987), IV, 94-100 (p.100), suggests that 'in most instances, every aspect of a culture or religion seems to presuppose a view of the cosmos.'

from which God created every thing else. Ibn ʿArabī, on the other hand, appears to understand Muḥammad's perfection as indicating both the comprehensiveness of his knowledge of God and the priority and posteriority of his ontological status; he does not mention Muḥammad as creative principle.

Muḥammad as creative principle

There are at least three degrees of 'things' in al-Nābulusī's cosmogony. There is the Light of God. From this God created the light of Muḥammad.⁶⁷ And then there are all other things. He uses *ḥadīths* to support this theory in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and the Qur'ān in his book *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq*. However, the emergent cosmogony is rich with imagery which affects a great deal of what al-

⁶⁷ Al-Nābulusī completed this commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* in 1096 (1685). In 1104 (1693), he finished writing *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq*, a presentation of his own doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. Al-Nābulusī, *Al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq wa 'l-Khiṭāb al-Ṣidq*, ed. by B ʿAlā' al-Dīn (Damascus: IFEAD, 1995), p.5, refers to Muḥammad as 'the light which has appeared in every form.' He adds, on page 5, that this 'light' is 'derived from that first light without separation and without connection.' This is in a context in which he has described God first and then Muḥammad. It follows that God is the First Light and that Muḥammad, as the second light, is derived from God. This is consonant with his statements in the chapter on Muḥammad and elsewhere in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* with regard to Muḥammad being created as a light from the Light of God. However, the qualifier 'without separation and without connection' is an important difference. This seems to be 'creative' ambiguity on al-Nābulusī's part. He seems unwilling to admit that Muḥammad can be separate from the Light of God, yet he is also unwilling to admit that he is connected to it. It is difficult not to infer that he wants it both ways, but this is not really possible. As a consequence, there is a palpable tension in his thought in dealing with the transcendent God. Later, on page 54, al-Nābulusī states that 'the second existence is the Light of Muḥammad'. He adds that 'this second existence, which we have called contingent with regard to contingent things being characterised by it in the view of the intellect through the mastery of imagination, is the Light of Muḥammad from which God created every thing, as is related in the *ḥadīth*'. This establishes a creative link between the light of Muḥammad and everything else.

Nābulusī has to say concerning Muḥammad. This reflects a significant aspect of al-Nābulusī's creativity.

It has been noted above that al-Nābulusī interprets the celebrated Light Verse (Qur'ān 24:35) in his commentary on Muḥammad. He interprets this verse to support his contention that the Light of Muḥammad is created from the Light of God and that God created every thing else from that Muḥammadan Light.⁶⁸ Furthermore, al-Nābulusī argues that the Light of Muḥammad is the likeness of the Light of God. This maintains the distinction between the absolute Absoluteness of God and the createdness of Muḥammad.⁶⁹

Later in his commentary, al-Nābulusī interprets Qur'ān 108:1:

God said, 'We have given you abundance (*al-kawthar*).' [Abundance] is a river in Heaven. [The river] is multiplicity in oneness. [The multiplicity] is all the words⁷⁰ (*jawāmi' al-kalim*).⁷¹

The Qur'ānic verse in question refers to Muḥammad. He is given an abundance by God which is understood by various commentators to be a river in

⁶⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308.

⁶⁹ Abū Zayd, NH, 'Divine Attributes in the Qur'ān - Some Poetic Aspects' in *Islam and Modernity - Muslim Intellectuals Respond*, ed. by John Cooper and others (London and New York: IB Tauris, 1998), pp.190-211 (p.205), highlights the importance of the Light Verse (Qur'ān 24:35) for supporting the notion that the whole of the universe is as light emanating from the Light of God. Abū Zayd's understanding of the Islamic tradition, and specifically Ibn 'Arabī, seems to be in accord with al-Nābulusī's theories here.

⁷⁰ Chodkiewicz, *Seal*, p.65, says that the 'long pilgrimage of the Muḥammadan Light through the aeons is a logical consequence of the fundamental doctrine, according to which the successive prophetic messages, as multiple manifestations of the one Truth, are so many stages leading up to him who will bring the 'full sum of the Words' (*jawāmi' al-kalim*), simultaneously perfecting and abrogating the previous Laws.' He seems to understand the totality or full sum of the words as indicating all the previous manifestations of the one Truth or God.

⁷¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309.

Heaven.⁷² Al-Nābulusī is au fait with the tradition of exegesis on this verse. However, he states that this abundance is in fact a ‘multiplicity of words’ in a state of oneness. It has been noted above that the One God created from His Light the Light of Muḥammad. From this Muhammadian Light was created the multiplicity of things constituting the world of multiplicity. God gave Muḥammad the ‘abundance’ or ‘all the words of creation.’ Muḥammad is the medium between God and creation. It is in and through him that creation is engendered. This appears to be the significance of al-Nābulusī’s interpretation of Qur’ān 108:1.

Ibn ‘Arabī mentions the concept of ‘all the words’:

He was given all the words which are what are denoted by the names of Adam.⁷³

Al-Nābulusī recognises the allusion to Qur’ān 2:31 in this statement and adds:

‘God taught Adam all the names,’ which are the names of every thing, but He taught Muḥammad what are denoted by those names.⁷⁴

From al-Nābulusī’s ensuing statement it is clear that the phrase ‘what are denoted by’ (*musammayāt*) signifies ‘essences’ (*dhawāt*).⁷⁵ ‘All the words’ are therefore the essences of every thing. Adam was taught the names of every thing by God, but God gave Muḥammad the ‘abundance’ or ‘multiplicity of words in oneness.’

⁷² Yūsuf ‘Alī, A, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’ān*, 7th edn (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 1995), p.1706.

⁷³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 214.

⁷⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308-9.

This 'abundance' now signifies the essences of everything in a state of oneness. This is explained further by al-Nābulusī:

Names are the forms of words but the essences are their meanings. Names are the world of bodies while essences are the world of spirits. Bodies are from Spirits. Spirits are from the Light of Muḥammad, which is from the Light of God.⁷⁶

This is a statement of cosmology using the metaphorical language of bodies and spirits, forms and essences, and words and meanings. Muḥammad is associated with spirits, essences and meanings, while Adam is associated with bodies, forms and words. The One Light of Muḥammad is derived from the One Light of God. Spirits are derived from the Light of Muḥammad. From the multiplicity of these spirits comes the multiplicity of bodies.

Al-Nābulusī refers to these same concepts and connects them with Muḥammad in other parts of the commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. In a description of the Perfect Man, he states:

He [the Perfect Man] ... is the divine word which separates truth from falsehood and which gathers together the meanings of all the words. He [Muḥammad] said, 'I was given all the words.' The rest of the world apart from him [the Perfect Man] is the incomplete [or imperfect] words of God. God said, 'The likeness of a good word is like a good tree.'⁷⁷ God said, 'The likeness of a bad word is like a bad tree.'⁷⁸ ... The whole world, the upper and lower, is made perfect through the existence of the Perfect Man.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309. However, on page 326, al-Nābulusī states that God's beautiful names all have effects (*āthār*) which constitute everything that appears in the world. Al-Nābulusī refers to these effects as 'what are denoted by all those names' (*musammayāt tilka al-asmā' kullihā*).

⁷⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309.

⁷⁷ Qur'ān 14:24.

⁷⁸ Qur'ān 14:26.

⁷⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 25.

Al-Nābulusī views the Perfect Man as a ‘divine word.’ He is the only complete and perfect ‘word.’ God gave this perfect ‘word’ the multiplicity of all words that constitute creation. It has already been noted that both Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Nābulusī agree that Muḥammad is the most perfect existent thing, but what they understand by this appears to be different. When al-Nābulusī adds that the Perfect Man is the only complete and perfect word, there is a correspondence of significance: Muḥammad is the Perfect Man and he is the most perfect and complete existent thing. The Perfect Man or perfect word in the above citation is said to gather together the meanings of all words. This is a reference to Muḥammad. It is Muḥammad who has been associated with the function of gathering together all the meanings of words, essences of forms, and the spirits of bodies. Words signify the multiplicity of God’s created things and Muḥammad, as perfect word or man, is the light or spirit giving them all existence.

Al-Nābulusī elaborates his understanding of ‘words’:

What is meant by word is the perfect human essence. Calling it a word has appeared in the Qur’ān. ... God said concerning Maryam’s belief in the rest of the prophets, ‘And she believed in the words of her Lord and His books.’⁸⁰ It is possible to call perfect souls words⁸¹

This reveals al-Nābulusī’s belief that ‘words’ are metaphors for perfect human essences, such as the series of prophets from Adam until Muḥammad. Al-Nābulusī views the Perfect Man as a word and adds that:

The Perfect Man ... is Adam and his children until the Day of Resurrection.⁸²

⁸⁰ Qur’ān 66:12.

⁸¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 7.

⁸² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 42.

These perfect human essences are also called perfect souls which are also termed words. The dominant motif in this is 'word'. Al-Nābulusī connects this image of words with a creation myth:

Know that the complete and virtuous words of God which concern us [here] descended to us. Their origin is an exalted single spirit (*rūḥ*). ... This exalted spirit is the first creation created by God. There is no mediator between it [the spirit] and the [divine] command of God. God said, 'And they ask you about the spirit. 'Say: "The spirit is from the command of my Lord."' ⁸³ ... And [know] that this spirit which is the first creation is called the Light of Muḥammad in one aspect, and is called intellect and throne in another aspect. ... This spirit is to God in the position of air to someone who is breathing or speaking. ... There is a great difference between them. ⁸⁴

This statement reveals that for al-Nābulusī the words comprising creation all descended from God via the concept of Muḥammad. This is now called 'the exalted single spirit'. ⁸⁵ This is the cosmic Muḥammad. It is described as being the first creation and the Light of Muḥammad. This exalted spirit or Light of Muḥammad is said to have no mediator between itself and the [divine] command of God. On the other hand, there is a great difference between this spirit and God. The mention of the [divine] command of God appears to be a reference to the command which began with Muḥammad and ended with him as discussed above.

Al-Nābulusī has alluded to the likeness of God as being someone who speaks or breathes. This is a dominant theme in his early comments in the commentary. This

⁸³ Qur'ān 17:85.

⁸⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 7-8.

⁸⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, I, 215-6, cites Qur'ān 15:29 or 38:72 - 'And I breathed into him of My Spirit.' Whereas Ibn 'Arabī is interested in the perfect man - call him Adam or Muḥammad - as the recipient of this Divine Spirit and its effect on him, al-Nābulusī is interested in the Spirit itself. Al-Nābulusī is interested in the concept of Muḥammad as Spirit or Light.

is in harmony with creation being speech. Created things are words. God, who creates or speaks, needs air with which to form His words and imbue them with meaning. The likeness of Muḥammad is this air. God breathes in the spirit of Muḥammad and then breathes out, producing the words of creation:

God said, 'What we say to a thing that we want is that we say to it, "Be!" and it is.'⁸⁶ That which is said (*al-qawl*) is speech (*al-kalām*). The thing appears through what is said. ... Good words and bad words appear.⁸⁷

There is Qur'ānic support for the use of the metaphor of speech for the act of creation. Just as God can be said to create the infinitude of created things, He can be said to utter an infinitude of words. Created things and words can both be said to be either good or bad.

Having stated that 'all the words' were given to Muḥammad as the first creation and exalted spirit with which these words were uttered and thus created, al-Nābulusī cites two Qur'ānic verses to explain the sheer infinitude of the multiplicity of these words. This multiplicity was alluded to in the citation of Qur'ān 108:1 which was understood as referring to Muḥammad's divine gift of the river of abundance (*al-kawthar*) in Heaven, that is to say, multiplicity in oneness. Al-Nābulusī states:

All the words about which God said, 'If the ocean were ink for the words of my Lord, sooner would the ocean be exhausted than would the words of my Lord, even if we brought another to help it.'⁸⁸ And He said, 'If all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean (were ink) with seven oceans after it to help it, the words of God would not be exhausted.'⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Qur'ān 16:40.

⁸⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 8-9.

⁸⁸ Qur'ān 18:109.

⁸⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309. The second citation is Qur'ān 31:27.

In both these Qur'ānic verses, the words of God are described as being infinite. In the context of al-Nābulusī's discussion of 'all the words' that were given to Muhammad, these verses appear to emphasise the idea of the infinitude of the multiplicity inherent in the oneness of the river of abundance (*al-kawthar*).⁹⁰

Al-Nābulusī has cited the Qur'ān to the effect that good and bad words are like good and bad trees. These were cited at the beginning of his commentary in a context where he was discussing Muḥammad as Perfect Man and as the force in the cosmos that gathers together all the words of creation. These words of creation were said to be imperfect and either good or bad. Muḥammad perfected them through the gift of existence. Al-Nābulusī cites these same Qur'ānic verses which liken trees to words immediately following his contention that the words of God are infinite and that they were given to Muhammad. This infinitude of words is called 'the [divine] command' or 'matter' (*al-amr*)⁹¹:

[The words of God would never be exhausted] although the [divine] command is divided into two parts. God said, 'The likeness of a good word is like a good tree.'⁹² And He said, 'The likeness of a bad word is like a bad tree.'⁹³

⁹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XXI, 46 & XVI, 27, does not elucidate clearly what is signified by 'words' in these verses. It seems that the words or wisdom of God are signified, but certainly not the infinitude of things that constitute the world. Al-Hakīm, S, *al-Mu'jam al-Ṣūfī - al-Ḥikma fī Ḥudūd al-Kalima* (Beirut: Dendera, 1981), p.975, suggests that Ibn 'Arabī understands the word 'words' in Qur'ān 18:109 as signifying 'existent things' (*al-mawjūdāt*). Furthermore, Wolfson, HA, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge and London: HUP, 1976), pp.252-257, discusses the debates in Kalām in the 9th century concerning the nature of the Word of God. Some schools of thought believed in it being single and indivisible whilst uncreated, while others believed in its differentiation in this uncreated state. It is clear from Wolfson that what is signified by 'Word' or 'words' in these debates actually is 'Word' or 'words'.

⁹¹ It has already been mentioned that '*al-amr*' has the sense of command, matter, affair, or everything. The Qur'ān uses it in contexts of the creation and Day of judgement, among others.

⁹² Qur'ān 14:24.

⁹³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309. The second citation is Qur'ān 14:26.

There is a value judgement in this division of everything into two parts. There are good words and bad words. There are good and bad trees. There are good and bad things in the world of creation. The totality of these words is the totality of essences of the names of everything. They are the multiplicity in oneness that is the river *al-kawthar* in paradise. Thus, the multiplicity in oneness includes what is both good and bad. It is logical to assume that since everything derives from a single source, which is the exalted spirit or the Light of Muhammad, and since there is what is good and what is bad in this world, both good and bad come from that same single source. There is an ethical element in this that is seemingly being interwoven with that of the metaphysics of creation.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, al-Nābulusī is stressing the theory that all things, whether good or bad and whether sense-perceptible, intelligible, or imagined, derive from a single source and that that source is Muhammad.

Al-Nābulusī states that God has likened these good and bad words to trees for three reasons:

He [God] has likened them [the two types of words] to trees (*shajara*) because of the mutual disputation (*tashājur*), multiplicity of branching, and difference of opinions.⁹⁵

From an initial etymological link between the word for mutual disputation and trees, al-Nābulusī is able to make use of the concepts of branching and difference.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ See the chapter on Zakariyyā in this thesis where it is shown that al-Nābulusī interweaves the ethics of mercy with the metaphysics of creation. This is a parallel to the present situation where al-Nābulusī is leaning away from the ethics of good and bad to the metaphysics of how God created the world.

⁹⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309.

The assumption behind this statement is the idea that from a single source or root springs an infinite multiplicity of trees and branches. These trees and branches are all different with the common factor of a shared source or origin. This is a restatement of the theory of the one and the many, God and creation. In the context of the discussion of the cosmic Muḥammad, this origin is clearly the exalted spirit, first creation or Light of Muḥammad:

Know that the complete and virtuous words of God which concern us [here] descended to us. Their origin is an exalted single spirit (*rūḥ*). ... This exalted spirit is the first creation created by God. ... And [know] that this spirit which is the first creation is called the Light of Muḥammad in one aspect.⁹⁷

With this as the context in which to appreciate al-Nābulusī's statements concerning the difference among the words or trees of creation, the idea of 'difference' or 'multiplicity' being emphasised by al-Nābulusī can be noted:

God said, 'They will not cease to disagree except those upon whom your Lord has bestowed mercy. For that did He create them.' That is, [God created them] for difference or for mercy, but difference is mercy.⁹⁸

This Qur'ānic verse suggests that there will be disagreement among people unless God is merciful to them. The divine mercy bestowed upon them will establish agreement, union and, thus, oneness. However, al-Nābulusī understands this verse as signifying that God created people either for disagreement or for mercy. Furthermore, he sees no paradox in stating that disagreement is mercy. Thus, if people continue to

⁹⁶ Lassner, J, 'The "One Who Had Knowledge of the Book" and the "Mightiest Name" of God. Qur'ānic Exegesis and Jewish Cultural Artifacts', in *Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations*, ed. by RL Netter (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 1, 59-74 (p.67), states that 'Medieval scholars had a great command of religious literature and an uncanny instinct for literary associations.'

⁹⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 7-8.

disagree that is a mercy from God. On the other hand, if they cease to disagree that is also a mercy from God.

This can be understood on a number of different levels. There is the obvious ethical level where both disagreement and agreement are understood as being a divine mercy. However, al-Nābulusī appears to be hinting more at the metaphysical level of the relationship of oneness with multiplicity. The origin of the multiplicity of words, trees, or created things is the one exalted spirit which is the Light of Muḥammad. At a certain point this multiplicity was in a state of oneness. Al-Nābulusī has used the image of the river of abundance in Heaven to describe this. When this multiplicity is brought into existence by the Light of Muḥammad they are bestowed with mercy which gives them their existence.⁹⁹ They then exist in the world of phenomena where they are characterised as being either good or bad.

However, they may also receive mercy from God and reunite themselves with the oneness of the Light of Muḥammad which is the likeness of the Light of God. In this state they will be one again with their origin. They are bestowed with mercy which gives them the insight to perceive this state of being.¹⁰⁰

In the chapter on Ibrāhīm there was a discussion of al-Nābulusī's understanding of the different states of awareness of God. The Sufi's awareness of God depends on mercy and grace from God. Only God can enable an individual to

⁹⁸ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309. The citation is Qur'ān 11:118-9.

⁹⁹ See the chapter on Zakariyyā for a thorough discussion of the dynamics of ontological mercy.

¹⁰⁰ It has been mentioned that al-Nābulusī associates God's Mercy with the concept of existentionation. The bestowal of existence is said to be an act of mercy. See the chapter on Zakariyyā for a detailed

fully realise a oneness with God. On the other hand, in the chapter on Zakariyyā there was a discussion of how God created everything out of the utter oneness of His Essence through the act and grace of mercy. Mercy is pivotal in the creative inclination away from God and in creation's yearning for an experience and knowledge of oneness with God.

Al-Nābulusī supports his statement that disagreement is a mercy with two

ḥadīths:

The messenger of God said, 'The disagreement of my community is a mercy.'¹⁰¹

And,

The disagreement of my companions is a mercy.¹⁰²

discussion of this issue. There is also a discussion of the different stages of perceiving multiplicity and oneness in the chapter on Ibrāhīm.

¹⁰¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309. Al-Nābulusī states that this *ḥadīth* is from Naṣr al-Maqdisī (or al-Muqaddasī), *Kitāb al-Ḥujjah*. This *ḥadīth* has been used greatly by *fuqahā* over the centuries. Schacht, J, 'Ikhtilāf', in *EI*² (Leiden: Brill, 1971), III, 1061-2 (p.1061), states that 'ikhtilāf', as a technical term, signified the differences of opinion amongst the authorities of religious law, both between the several schools and within each of them. It is known that al-Nābulusī was an accomplished *faqīh*. He would probably have been aware of the literature and ideas revolving around the concept of *ikhtilāf*. Azizy, AQ, 'Ikhtilāf in Islamic Law with Special Reference to the Shāfi'ī School', *Islamic Studies*, 34iv (1995), 367-384 (p.373) puts forward various views concerning the origins of this *ḥadīth* in the midst of a general discussion of 'ikhtilāf' throughout the course of Islamic Legal history.

¹⁰² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, p.309. Al-Nābulusī states that this *ḥadīth* is from al-Daylamī, *Musnad al-Firdaws*. Calder, N, 'Ikhtilāf and Ijmā' in Shāfi'ī's *Risāla*', *Studia Islamica*, 58 (1983), 55-81 (p.72) introduces a metaphysical element not wholly unrelated to what al-Nābulusī seems to be suggesting here. Calder states 'there was grand metaphysical value in the assertion that the Islamic community could not unite on an error and a more prosaic usefulness, in view of the evidence of recorded dispute, in the assertion that the community remained infallible even when it did not achieve *ijmā'*, even when it held and promulgated divergent juristic views.' Clearly, al-Nābulusī is stressing the metaphysical over the juristic in the present context, and, as such, is universalising the juristic theory of *ikhtilāf*.

It appears that both of these *ḥadīths* signify the same thing for al-Nābulusī: the world of multiplicity exists thanks to divine mercy. Al-Nābulusī provides a comment on the last *ḥadīth*:

They [the Prophet's companions] are his companions through the light from which they were created.¹⁰³

This suggests that what made creation the companions of Muḥammad is the light from which they were created. This light is the Light of Muḥammad.

This *ḥadīth* can be interpreted on at least two different levels. Firstly, it can be said that Muḥammad's companions, created from the Light of Muḥammad, were Muḥammad's companions through the Light of Muḥammad. This Light had manifested itself in every Prophet from Adam to the historical Muḥammad. It reached its most perfect form in the historical Muḥammad. The Light of Muḥammad manifesting itself in the historical Muḥammad was the reason for Muḥammad's companions being his companions. Thus, to be a companion of Muḥammad one had to associate with and follow the historical Muḥammad, the perfect embodiment of the Light of Muḥammad.

On the other hand, everything is created from the Light of Muḥammad and thus in one respect everything is the same as that Light. Therefore, everything is a

¹⁰³ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 309.

companion of Muḥammad through the Light of Muḥammad which brings them into existence and sustains them.

That the companions of Muḥammad all disagree is because they are all created from their common single origin through an act of existential mercy. Muḥammad's companions - creation - are the multiplicity of words that are one in him. They are 'all the words' he was given by God. They are multiplicity in oneness in the river of abundance that God gave to Muḥammad. It is from Muḥammad, the Demiurgic figure in al-Nābulusī's cosmogony, that the spirits and bodies of creation were drawn. He is their origin. As al-Nābulusī has said:

The Reality of Realities ... which is the Light of our Prophet Muḥammad who is the first creation. God created from him every thing. He is the Reality of every reality. ... There is no doubt that the Divine Reality and the Muḥammadan Reality gather together every perfection.¹⁰⁴

This is what al-Nābulusī means when he finishes his discussion of the cosmic concept of Muḥammad:

Understand, wayfarer! The meaning of the Muḥammadan Reality which permeates every thing belongs to those who have realised it [the Reality] with the help of God.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Al-Nābulusī interprets the Light Verse (Qur'ān 24:35) to support his view that the Light of Muḥammad is created from the Light of God and that God created every

¹⁰⁴ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 32-3. Al-Nābulusī does clarify that although God and Muḥammad have similar functions, these functions pertain to different worlds. The Divine Reality gathers together every perfection in the 'world of the [divine] command,' whereas the Muḥammadan Reality does so in the 'world of creation.'

thing else from that Muḥammadan Light.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, al-Nābulusī argues that the Light of Muḥammad is the likeness of the Light of God. This maintains the distinction between the absolute Absoluteness of God and the createdness of Muḥammad.

Although the concept of the Light of Muḥammad appears to fulfil a number of functions conventionally attributed to God, such as being the Demiurge who brings about creation, it has to be emphasised that al-Nābulusī constantly stresses the difference between God and Muḥammad. Firstly, there is the fact that al-Nābulusī consistently refers to Muḥammad as God's creation and that God gave him all the words and their meanings. God is active, while Muḥammad is passive. However, he goes further:

The created Perfect Man descended in the Divine Form from the rank of He who created him. This is God because He has the rank of activity while the [Perfect] Man has the rank of passivity, despite his being in His [God's] Form. ... God is active first of all. That is to say, He is in the real, first, active rank However, the form of the Perfect Man is active secondly He [the Perfect Man] does not have the rank of first activity which belongs to God, although he does have the rank of metaphorical secondary activity.¹⁰⁷

Since Muḥammad is the Perfect Man par excellence and is in a close relationship with God, it is appropriate to interpret the above citation as referring to Muḥammad as much as any other so-called Perfect Man. It has already been shown how al-Nābulusī views Muḥammad as being derived from God and that God acts or

¹⁰⁵ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 312.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 308.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 320.

creates through him.¹⁰⁸ This absolves God from the work of creation, although still ‘doing’ it, but through Muhammad. God’s transcendence is not compromised. The above citation reveals that, for al-Nābulusī, Muḥammad as the Perfect Man is a secondary agent. The prime agent is God Himself. God acts through Muḥammad. God is what is real. Everything else is a metaphor, representing ‘that real.’

The secondary agent known as Muḥammad is a pivotal figure in the cosmogony presented by al-Nābulusī, but it is not identical with God. God is different to it. God is real. God is transcendent. The Light of Muḥammad is the likeness of the Light of God. Muḥammad is similar to the transcendent God, but he is not that God. He is only a likeness. He is a metaphor for God, but God is reality. At the end of his commentary when arguing that the God of creeds, beliefs and faith is not the same as the God of reality, al-Nābulusī states that when someone believes that God is transcendent, this transcendence is not real:

If he [the servant] wants, He [God] is absolute in his [the servant’s] belief with respect to what that servant knows of the lack of specification of form in His self. This is rational metaphorical absoluteness and not real absoluteness in which God in His self is.¹⁰⁹

Al-Nābulusī also states this at the beginning of the commentary:

The transcendent God which is in [people’s] beliefs must be affirmed by every legally responsible believer. This is not the True God about Whom there is no rational judgement, either by affirmation or by denial.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ There is a tension between the creationist and emanationist models in the thought of al-Nābulusī. This may not be a significant issue, since these models are used to make different points. Although they complement each other, they are not in harmony. Creation does not imply that the creator and his creation are ontologically similar, whereas emanation does imply an ontological similarity or nexus between them.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, II, 340.

¹¹⁰ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, I, 6.

Furthermore, he states:

[God] is the true existent, and the agent, and the one who makes effects. ... [The messenger of God] is the real vicegerent of God, and the closest metaphorical agent to Him.¹¹¹

God is reality and, as discussed in the chapter on Zakariyyā and elsewhere, existence. Furthermore, He is Light too. God created Muḥammad as His likeness.

They are similar yet different. To sum up al-Nābulusī's position on this, it is best to quote him:

There are two types of light. There is the Light of God, which is the Absolute Unseen and the Eternally Pre-existent Light. There is also the light of the originated world. This is the Light of our Prophet [Muḥammad], who was the first thing God created from His Light. [God] then created everything from him. He [Muḥammad] is everything with regard to quiddities (*māhiyya*), but everything is not him with regard to forms (*ṣūratān*). However, he is the Light of God with regard to quiddities, but he is not the Light of God with regard to forms.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 10.

¹¹² Al-Nābulusī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 53.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

This thesis has examined six chapters from al-Nābulusī's commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. One of these was an account of his stated intentions for writing the commentary along with his views about mankind.¹ The other five were intralinear commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. Furthermore, an account of al-Nābulusī's intellectual life was described in chapter two to facilitate an appreciation of the context in which the commentary was written.

Chapter two revealed that the intellectual context in which al-Nābulusī lived and worked was a vibrant and rigorous one. There were anti-corruption and anti-Sufi movements. However, these movements were more complex than is currently understood. The case of al-Uṣṭuwānī was elaborated. He was one of al-Nābulusī's teachers and a prominent leader of the Kadizadeliler movement which has been described in contemporary scholarship as being both anti-Sufi and in particular anti-Ibn ʿArabī. Despite this, al-Uṣṭuwānī is said to have defended Ibn ʿArabī from his detractors while condemning certain contemporaneous practices he considered antinomian. Furthermore, al-Nābulusī informs us that Ibn ʿArabī was misunderstood

¹ See Wiener, PP, 'Some Problems and Methods in the History of Ideas', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 22iv (1961), 531-548 (p.539) where he states that 'the intellectual historian is faced with the problem of comparing the statements of a thinker about himself and his methods with his actual attainments and methods'.

both in the present and in the past. Consequently he engages with both contexts in writing his commentary.

The remaining chapters focus on a number of themes that were of importance both in Ibn ʿArabī's thought *per se* and in the forging of Ibn ʿArabī's polemical image in Medieval Islam: the relationship between God and man; the metaphysics and ethics of divine mercy; God and the worship of the golden calf; prophets, messengers and friends of God; Pharaoh's profession of faith; and the position of Muḥammad in Sufi thought. These chapters reveal al-Nābulusī's intellectual and cultural creativity in four different but occasionally overlapping fields.

First, there is al-Nābulusī's interaction with Ibn ʿArabī's ideas and themes. There is undoubtedly a tendency towards apologetics in al-Nābulusī's handling of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, but he does alter various themes and introduce new ideas. Al-Nābulusī's commentary provides evidence that his writings are the products of an important and significant thinker. Beyond the context of a comparison with Ibn ʿArabī, al-Nābulusī is an intellectual thinker whose works and ideas are worthy of independent study.

Within al-Nābulusī's commentary a dominant theme is that of the absolute absoluteness of God or the real transcendence of God in Himself. This is juxtaposed with the concept of the transcendent God which is known to man in various ways in accordance with the degrees of faith and knowledge that man has in and of God. It is stressed that God and man are not identical, while at the same time al-Nābulusī does introduce other themes, such as the emanationist metaphor of creation, which blur the

distinctions between God and man. Ultimately these apparent contradictions in al-Nābulusī's thought may simply be contradictions, since he may have consciously adopted incompatible beliefs in different moods and at different times.²

Second, al-Nābulusī's use of Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* in explicating both Ibn 'Arabī's themes and in introducing his own ideas.³ Al-Nābulusī cites Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīths* frequently. He makes bold thematic and verbal connections between various citations and also with his own and Ibn 'Arabī's statements. In exploiting the ambiguity of language and the richness of images, he can produce new elements and sophisticated interpretations.⁴

Third, al-Nābulusī is creative in his use of language, narrative, and metaphor in the composition of his commentary. This is related to his use of Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*.⁵ Al-Nābulusī as commentator and teacher is adept at the exploitation of language and narrative in explicating his ideas. He reveals his grasp of grammar and of imagery. It

² See Skinner, Q. 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8 (1969), 3-53 (pp.20 & 30).

³ Note that Böwering, G. 'Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy', in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, ed. by De Jong, F & Radtke, B (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp.45-67 (p.64) suggests that 'the opponents of Sufism ... recognised the power of Sufi Koran interpretation and combatted [sic] it with polemical invective.'

⁴ See Johns, AH. 'On Qur'ānic Exegetes & Exegesis - a Case Study in the Transmission of Islamic Learning', in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society*, ed. by PG Riddell & T Street, (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), pp.3-49 (p.17) where he suggests that 'there is potential in works of exegesis for a richness and diversity in the movement of ideas, a shift from theme to theme, the occasional taking up of topics at an unexpected length'. This is certainly true of al-Nābulusī's commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

⁵ Riddell, PG. 'The Transmission of Narrative-Based Exegesis', in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society*, ed. by PG Riddell & T Street, (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), pp.57-80 (p.58) where he argues that 'Islam depends heavily upon narrative as a device for transmitting religious messages and morals'.

is worth noting that in Western scholarship al-Nābulusī has been traditionally known as a poet and commentator on the poems of Ibn al-Fārid, as well as a travel writer.

Finally, al-Nābulusī is daring in his legal approach to arguing the case for the soundness of Pharaoh's profession of faith. Again he applies the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth* and his grasp of the Arabic language to formulate and support his arguments. He shows an intellectual vibrancy and boldness in his legal approach to the case of Pharaoh's faith. In this al-Nābulusī, who was to become Hanafī mufti of Damascus later in life, is indicative of a wider phenomenon in the provinces of the Ottoman empire - the intellectual vigour and importance of the post-classical period.⁶

Having shown al-Nābulusī's intellectual and cultural outlook in four different fields, there are four main conclusions to be derived from this. First, al-Nābulusī's commentary is important both as an intellectual work in its own right as well as a commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

Second, al-Nābulusī, as commentator on Ibn ʿArabī, indicates that the polemical image of Ibn ʿArabī was still a significant issue in the 17th and 18th centuries. This issue was important for individuals and movements in the Ottoman empire of this period as both al-Nābulusī and al-Uṣṭuwānī show. Furthermore, al-Nābulusī contributed to the intellectual tradition concerning Ibn ʿArabī's polemical image which

⁶ See Gerber, H. *Islamic Law and Culture 1600-1840* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp.28 & 135.

transcends particular historical contexts.⁷ This conclusion is important in the absence of any critical studies on the reception of Ibn ʿArabī's thought in this period.⁸

Third, this thesis is further evidence for the refutation of the decline paradigm of traditional Ottoman historiography. This paradigm has been convincingly refuted on the political, economic, social, and legal level by a growing number of scholars.⁹ Al-Nābulusī's intellectual life, and in particular his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, show that he, like many of his near contemporaries such as Khair al-Dīn al-Ramlī (d.1081/1671), al-Haskafī (d.1088/1677), al-Shurunbulālī (d.1069/1658) and so on, were not devoid of intellectual vigour and importance.¹⁰

Finally, all four fields of al-Nābulusī's approach to the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* reveal a dependence on a bold understanding and application of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. This is a significant element of al-Nābulusī's intellectual and cultural importance. *Tafsīr* studies have traditionally jumped from the classical period of Islamic cultural history to the 19th century, ignoring the Ottoman period.¹¹ Al-Nābulusī's commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is as much an interpretation of the Qur'ān as it is of the

⁷ Femia, JV, 'An Historicist Critique of "Revisionist" Methods for Studying the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 20 (1981), 113-134 (p.115) where he supports the position that 'thinkers do work within intellectual traditions, which - to some extent - transcend particular contexts'.

⁸ Knysh, AD, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition - the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), finishes his useful study of this important theme with the Mamluks in Egypt and the Levant and the Rasulids in Yemen. He does not address the issue of Ibn ʿArabī in the Ottoman period.

⁹ Most recently by Inalcik, H & Quataert, D (eds), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire - Volume 2: 1600-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Ze'evi, D, *An Ottoman Century - The District of Jerusalem in the 1600s* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996); Gerber, H, *State, Society, and Law in Islam - Ottoman Law in Comparative Perspective* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994); and Gerber, *Islamic Law*.

¹⁰ Gerber, *Islamic Law*, pp.23, 27-28.

¹¹ Rippin, A, 'The Present Status of *Tafsīr* Studies', *The Muslim World*, 72 (1982), 224-238 (p.236).

Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam.¹² In this light, works such as those of al-Nābulusī have the potential to reveal new fields for appreciating the reception and application of the Qur'ān in the Ottoman period.

¹² Nettler, RL. 'The Figure and Truth of Abraham in Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 24 (1998), 21-50 (p.21), argues that the Qur'ānic and traditional elements usually serve as Ibn 'Arabi's foundation in explicating his ideas, which for him are the meaning of the Qur'ān and related tradition.

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